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The Strike General and the General Betrayal



By
John Pepper

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The General Strike and the General Betrayal

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HOW DID IT COME ABOUT?

GENERAL strike in Britain—general challenge to the State Power of British capitalism—events of gigantic proportion which not only shattered the economic and political life of Great Britain for weeks, not only led to temporary disorganization of world economy, but also inspired a mighty wave of enthusiasm and solidarity throughout the whole international labor movement.

The great British General Strike in May, 1926—the first general strike in a highly industrial country—undoubtedly marked a prominent milestone in the history of the world revolution. This general strike of the British working class and the great general betrayal of the official leaders of the British labor movement will unquestionably occupy the central point of study for the entire international labor movement for a long time to come.

The mere fact of the General strike enriches the arsenal of the working class in the West European and American industrial countries. The general strike has until now only been discussed in the industrial countries, but it has never been applied on a nation-wide scale which really included the broad millions of the working class. The possibility of a general strike lasting almost two weeks without the disruption of the framework of capitalist society is a fundamental experience for the international labor movement. The study of the connections between politics and economics on the basis of the British General Strike will, on the one hand completely confirm the teachings of Marx and Lenin, and on the other hand supply new inter-

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esting concrete disclosures. The wealth of manifold possibilities of the capitalist state power and the "self-aid" of the bourgeoisie against the general strike will certainly supply many new details to illustrate the Leninist theory of the Sate. We must carefully study the colorful picture of the spontaneity of the working masses themselves, the resourceful initiative of the local labor organizations, and the important, though only as yet embryonic beginnings of the dual government. The great struggle has enriched the history of international opportunism, already so rich in betrayal, by a particularly crass chapter. The eight leaders, MacDonald, Thomas & Co., in May, 1926, have applied the chief tenet of the traitors' international, the same as was applied as early as 1918 in the January strike in Germany by Ebert, Scheidemann & Co.: to put themselves at the head of the movement in order, at the proper moment to be able to throttle it the more certainly and cold-bloodedly.

In its two weeks of titanic struggle the British working class has learned more than in two decades of peaceful reformist evolution. The central question formulated by the great struggle is this: how did it really happen, how did it become possible that in the workday Britain of reformism, of peaceful evolution, such wild social struggles could convulse the whole body of society?

THE DECLINE OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE

FOR generations England has been the typical country of development without leaps and bounds, the model country of evolution which greeted the possibility of revolution with ironical laughter. The British ruling class was famed as the cleverest in the world, regulating everything by means of its diplomacy, by its ability to make concessions on non-essentials, by means of its fabulous elasticity. And what has happened now? By what circumstances has the British ruling class been so transformed that it now substitutes for diplomacy—the bayonet, for elasticity—brutal rampage, for concessions—terror?

At the other pole the British working class was praised as the calmest and most sensible in the world. For decades the British workers were paraded as models before the socialism-infected European proletariat by the valedictorians of capitalism, by the parlor socialists, the reformists and quacks of all sorts and shadings.

What has happened to the British working class? What circumstances have torn it from its guild exclusiveness? What circumstances have driven the pure and simple trade unionists of Britain into the deep waters of the General Strike? How did it come about that the British working class, which for the last two generations accepted capitalism as a matter-of-course, god-ordained, scheme of things, now, by means of the mightiest general strike in the history of the labor movement, shakes the very foundations of the capitalist structure of Great Britain.

The most deep-going world-historical changes had to intervene in order to fling the British ruling class out of their "imperturbable cleverness" and at the same time tear the British working class from its famous "common sense." Nothing less than the decline of the British empire was necessary to effect this transformation.

In the years of ascendant British imperialism, an unbroken flow of super-profits streamed into Great Britain from the colonies. England was the workshop of the world and all the agrarian countries of Europe were forced to purchase her industrial products. Tremendous riches were piled up in the British metropolis. And this monopoly, this fabulous accumulation of capital, this stream of extra profits, was the foundation of the cleverness and complaisance of the British rulers, as well as of the "common-sense" and the reformism of the British workers. The bourgeoisie was in a position to make concessions because it was dealing *en gros*, and the British proletariat could well follow reformist politics because from the ample table of their rich lord quite a juicy morsel fell off also for them.

The rise of the younger imperialisms of Germany and America in the nineties for the first time shook the monopoly of the British empire. The World War, the growing predominance of the robust American imperialism, and the rapid industrialization of the colonies and Dominions of the British Empire initiated its final and irremediable decline. Wealth reconciles, poverty breeds squabbles! The exhaustion of the broad stream of extra profits has also dried up the source of the "cleverness" and complaisance of the capitalists as well as of the "common-sense" and reformism of the British workers.

The industrialization of the colonies, the rising economic hegemony of America—between these two millstones present-day capitalist Europe, and primarily the British Empire, is being ground to dust. European hegemony and above all that of Great Britain was based upon the appropriation of a part of the surplus value from the colonies. The industrialization of the colonies and the progress of the revolutionary liberation movement of the colonial peoples make more and more difficult the garnering of the super-profits for European imperialism. On the contrary, Europe and even proud Britannia are forced to

hand over to America a part of their surplus values in the form of the amortization of its debts. Confronted with this dilemma European imperialism approaches its decline, and with Europe there falls also the pre-eminence of the British Empire.

The Communist Manifesto said:

"The cheap prices of its (the bourgeoisie's) commodities are the heavy artillery with which it batters down all Chinese walls, with which it forces the barbarians' intensely obstinate hatred of foreigners to capitulate."

The colonial "barbarians" have their own "artillery" however. They have established their own industry which, upon the basis of the lower wages and longer hours of the native workers batters down all the Chinese walls of their British mother-land by means of their own even lower prices.

In the East the progressing industrialization of the "barbarians," in the West the growing economic hegemony of the United States of America. American capitalism is still on an ascending curve, it produces more than half of the world production of the most important commodities: coal, copper, cotton, iron, steel, gasoline, automobiles. It is already today the greatest capital exporting country in the world and strives more and more to achieve a monopoly in all fields of capital export. The world owes not less than \$21,000,000,000 to the United States of America. And the indebtedness of Europe, Latin America and Canada to the United States, becomes ever heavier. Great Britain has given place to America as the protagonist of capitalism. The biggest trusts, the almost 100% monopolies, are not in Britain, but in America, built upon the backs of the worker and farmer masses.

"The Economic Supremacy of America"—this is the characteristic title of the report of the representatives of "The Federation of British Industries" concerning their visit to America. These leading personalities of British in-

dustury describe in greatest amazement the technical and economic progress and expansion of American industry. And in pale fear they report that the United States of America must in an ever-growing measure constitute the most dangerous and most successful competitor of the British economy.

General and irresistible is the decline of the British Empire.

The most important dominions threaten secession, their centrifugal forces becoming ever stronger.

The financial hegemony of Great Britain is a thing of the past.

The productive forces of Great Britain have grown. Yet in production its most important branches of industry are still unable, despite desperate struggle, to attain the pre-war standard.

British foreign trade is declining. The unfavorable balance of trade is mounting.

Capitalist accumulation no longer goes forward in the good old way. Great Britain is hardly in position to continue a large-scale capital export. The capital-needy countries, even Britain's own Dominions, no longer look to London, but to New York.

Mass unemployment has become chronic.

The classic system of British parliamentarism, the two-party system, a convenient see-saw, alternation of Conservative and Liberal parties in power, came to an end with the rise of the Labor Party. With the decline of the British Empire the hoary Liberal Party is also vanishing and the political mass organizations of the working class are pressing forward.

Even the famous insular security of Great Britain is threatened. Submarines and airships have attached the British Isles to the Continent.

The death knell of the British Empire is at the same time the storm signal for the sharpening of social struggles in Great Britain.

THE COAL CRISIS

THE lockout and the closely following strike of the miners was the inception of the general strike. The British coal industry is in a serious crisis which on the one hand constitutes merely a part of the general decline of the British Empire, on the other hand however, a section of the general world crisis of the coal industry.

For years the coal industry of the whole world has been in the grip of a crisis. Various causes contributed to the development of this world coal crisis.

Without entering into an extensive analysis of the world coal crisis let us merely enumerate its most important factors.

1. An increased coal production not only in the United States of America, but also in the virgin fields of Asia, Africa and Australia.
2. Shrinkage of the European market as a consequence of the decline of European industry.
3. The elimination of the Russian market.
4. The growing competition of German and French.
5. The substitution of soft for hard coal in Germany.
6. Growing displacement of coal by "white coal," by the exploitation of water power in Italy, France and Switzerland.
7. General saving in coal by technical improvements for more intensive exploitation of fuel.
8. The rapid growth in the dissemination of electricity and oil heating as new sources of power in industry and navigation.

The great technical revolution attendant upon the introduction of coal burning a few generations ago constituted the foundation of the British industrial hegemony. The new technical revolution of electricity and oil motors hastens the decline of British industry and the loss of British hegemony.

In addition to the general causes of the world coal crisis special causes had their effect in extraordinarily deepening the coal crisis in Great Britain.

In none of the big industrial countries does there prevail such technical backwardness and such an anarchy in coal production as in Great Britain. The report of the Royal Coal Commission draws an interesting picture of the situation. There are at present in Britain 1,400 mining enterprises operating about 2,500 shafts. Many of them employ less than 50 workers, a few more than 3,000. Not less than 98% of the total production is carried on by 715 enterprises, each of which employ more than 100 men, 93% of the production comes from 467 enterprises employing more than 500 workers, and 84% of the production comes from but 323 enterprises with more than 1,000 workers. The chaos and anarchy of British coal production is further illustrated with the following figures:

Twenty-three percent of all enterprises produce not less than 84% of the entire British coal supply.

The per capita production of the workers employed is on the decline: in the 'eighties the per capita production was still 319 tons. The annual average of 1914-18 was only 252 tons and in 1925 only 217 tons.

The serious technical backwardness of British mining is strikingly illustrated in the comparison with American coal production. The per capita production of workers employed was:

	Great Britain	United States
1909-13	257	636
1919-23	195	623
1924	220	655

The production of an American miner is thus three times as high as that of an English miner.

The gross coal production is declining while the number of miners employed is mounting. In 1913 there were 1,049,000 miners employed to produce 265.6 million tons. In 1923 there were 1,203,300 miners with a production of 276 million tons. In 1924 there were 1,213,600 miners who produced only 267 million tons; 1925 brought a still more rapid decline: the total British coal production amounted to only 245 million tons during this year.

At the same time however, a quarter million miners are constantly unemployed and swell the gigantic chronic industrial reserve army of the British working class. Under these circumstances it is no wonder that the coal industry finds itself in a state of bankruptcy. According to the report of the British Coal Commission the most important factor is that in the last quarter of 1925, 73% of the coal was produced at a loss if the government subsidy is left out of consideration.

Coal consumption in Great Britain is being reduced. Coal export is shrinking. In 1913 it still amounted to 94.4 million tons, in 1922 to 82, in 1924 to 79.3, and in 1925 to only 69 million tons. Coal export from Great Britain in 1925 were lower by 22% than in prewar times.

This deep-going coal crisis, however, signifies a catastrophe for the entire industrial and social life of Great Britain.

Not less than one and a quarter million workers are engaged in mining. Not less than one-twelfth of the population of Great Britain is dependent for its existence upon the welfare of the coal industry. Before the world war the coal export amounted to one-tenth of the total value of all the British exports, and what is still more important, to about four-fifths of the total volume of British export. The reduction of the coal exports means not only a direct

THE DILEMMA OF THE BRITISH CAPITALISTS

but also an indirect menace to the entire British industrial life. The reduction of coal export burdens the whole of British industry with increased expenses as a result of which British competitive power on the world market is further weakened. Not less than about four-fifths of the export cargoes of British shipping consisted of coal. For this very reason England was in a position to import its charges because the ships went out loaded with coal instead of empty, thus making possible a more intensive use of cargo space and an essential lowering of freight tariffs.

The British coal crisis is on the one hand but a part of the world coal crisis and of the general decline of British imperialism; on the other hand however, because of the fundamental importance of the coal industry, a mining crisis must extend itself into a general crisis of British economy.

This is the reason why British capitalism tried so long to avoid the crisis, why it tried to bridge it over somehow by means of government subsidies and Royal Coal Commissions.

THE first storm signals of the coal industry became apparent already in 1919. The strike of the miners at that time followed upon the setting up of the Royal Coal Commission, which proposed the nationalization of the mines to remedy the critical condition. At that time the British capitalists succeeded in crushing the miners, who were then still isolated from the other parts of the working class, as well as left in the lurch by their own leaders. The summer of 1925 saw the third act of the thrilling play. The owners tried to cut the wages of the miners, but, unexpectedly encountering the opposition not only of the miners, but also the railwaymen, dockers, and transport workers, they had to make a temporary retreat. The government decided to postpone the conflict and granted a subsidy which, in the course of nine months, up until its expiration on April 30, 1926, amounted to not less than 21 million pounds sterling. At the same time a Royal Coal Commission was instituted to study the question and find the proper solution for the crisis. This time, the commission was not composed of representatives of capitalists, workers and the "impartial general public" as was the case in 1919, but solely of representatives of capital. During these nine months in which the coal industry was maintained parasitically at the expense of the other industries, the situation of British economy became constantly more unbearable.

When the report of the Royal Coal Commission finally appeared the capitalists breathed easier. The commission

decisively rejected the nationalization of the mines. At the same time it rejected also the granting of further subsidies to the coal industry. It merely recommended a "rational" reorganization of the industry, but without compulsory measures, only upon a voluntary basis. It further recommended the nationalization of the mining royalties of the big landowners which lay as a crushing burden upon the coal districts, a government ownership, however, which provided an indemnity of 100 million pounds (\$500,000,000) to the landlords. The Commission's proposals mentioned also the possibility of a better system in the coal trade, but all these recommendations are merely stage-properties with which it sought to camouflage its real intentions. The chief proposal of the coal commission is to the effect that wages must come down. The proposal for a wage cut was the main point. The 1924 wage agreement fixed the minimum wage at 33% above that of 1914. The Royal Coal Commission, however, proposed a reduction of the minimum from 33% to 20% over the 1914 scale, which would mean a reduction of 10%. In order to size up the full rascality of this generous proposal one must consider that according to the official 1925 index the cost of living is 75% higher than in 1914.

The Coal Commission did not expressly recommend the lengthening of the miners' work-day, but merely said sanctimoniously that this measure would not be bad either if the workers would accept it "of their own accord."

Due to the solid front of the workers on "Red Friday," July 31, 1925, the British employers were forced for a time to cover the forfeiture of profits in the coal industry by government subsidies—that is, at the expense of the whole capitalist class (and of the working class). The report of the Royal Coal Commission proposes that the crisis in the coal industry be overcome entirely and solely at the expense of the workers. The mine barons have even gone a

step further. They demand not only a wage cut, not only the lengthening of the work-day, but also the smashing of the Miners' Federation, by refusing to enter upon a wage agreement on a national scale and expressing willingness to negotiate with the miners' organizations only by districts. The miners countered this scheme with the following workers' program:

No wage cut, no lengthening of the work day, no district agreements, maintenance of the national apparatus of the trade unions and the nationalization of the mines as the only way out of the capitalist anarchy.

The fundamental questions of capitalist society were thus raised by these conflicting standpoints of the capitalists and of the workers.

The question of the government's "mediation" already raised the question of state power in a certain form. The raising of the questions of the nationalization of the mines and of the big landlord's royalties jolted against the question of private property. The Conservative organ, the "Morning Post," with correct capitalist instinct, immediately sensed that the confiscation of the royalties evoked a menace to private property as a whole:

"If there is 'discontent' among the miners about royalties. THERE IS ALSO DISCONTENT (OF EXACTLY THE SAME SORT) ABOUT 'CAPITALISM' AND DIVIDENDS, AND A SURRENDER TO THE DISCONTENT ON THE ONE HAND WILL ONLY LEAD TO A CONCENTRATION OF THE DISCONTENT ON THE OTHER. That royalties are bad for business is arguable, that they may be unjust or iniquitous, on the Commission's own premises, is not arguable. And we can only say that if they are to be treated as a sop to Cerberus, the sop is too small, and the appetite will grow with what it feeds on." ("Morning Post," March 11, 1926.)

But not only the capitalists, but the labor leaders also immediately rushed to the aid of threatened private property. Varley, a member of the Miners' Federation Executive and Labor M. P. declares:

"If we can only have RATIONALIZATION by REVOLUTION I am not prepared to pay the price. I should think the price too big."

With unblushing candor the bourgeoisie demanded

that the workers bear the costs of the war—for the mining crisis is certainly a result of the war. With a fill of moral indignation of which only a British bourgeois is capable, the report of the Royal Coal Commission declares that the British workers object to paying the war costs:

"In so far as it (the method of comparison with pre-war rates) is used as a self-evident basis for claiming present wages equivalent in purchasing power to pre-war wages, it is open to the criticism that it assumes the possibility of all classes of work people being as well off after as before the war. It leaves none of these classes to help to pay for the war; more accurately, it assumes without inquiry either that the whole burden can and should be borne by other classes, or that technical developments since the war must have been sufficient at least to compensate for all the destruction of capital and division of energy that has taken place." (Cmd. 2600 [1926], p. 154.)

The coal crisis and the struggle between mining capital and mine workers confronts the British ruling class with a bitter dilemma. They had to take their choice of the roads to the overcoming of the crisis. One way was open in the restriction of production, in the closing down of smaller, technically backward, unprofitable enterprises, and the concentration of the production upon the large modern mines. Restriction of production—what would this mean in the language of the workers? Nothing other than a tremendous increase of chronic mass unemployment. It is interesting to read the sharpness with which Germany, one of the most important competitors of British coal upon the European continent, observes and judges the causes and effects of the coal crisis. The German "Germania" of January 21, 1926, writes as follows on the restriction of production as a way out of the British mining crisis:

"THE SUBSIDIES SERVED TO VEIL THE SITUATION FOR A FEW MONTHS, TODAY IT IS THE SUBSIDY THAT EXPOSES THE CRISIS. The figures published by the Mining Department in the beginning of January for the third quarter of 1925 show that in this period the coal industry, although subsidized, in August and September worked at a loss of from 5 pence to 3 shillings per ton, with the exception of two out of thirteen districts. Even the overtime and wage cuts which the employers now demand would by far not reduce the production costs to the extent of the subsidies.

If they are eliminated the next thing will be an increase in the price of the already unmarketable coal. Whether the desires of the employers will be fulfilled now or not, the Coal Commission will be forced to draw from the mine owners' evidence the conclusion that they themselves do not dare to draw: THAT THE SUPPLY MUST BE REDUCED IF THE INDUSTRY IS TO RECOVER. But this means INCREASED UNEMPLOYMENT, which can hardly be treated as a question of market juncture but largely as a final national forfeiture of opportunity for employment. WHAT WILL ENGLAND DO WITH HER UNEMPLOYED MINERS?"

But there is also another way out for British industry: it is that of wage cuts, longer hours, worsening of working conditions, and the smashing of the power of the trade unions. In other words: the reduction of the costs of production at the expense of the workers. This latter way would restore Britain's competitive power on the world market, but at the same time however force its rivals on the world market to a reduction of their wages and a cheapening of their own production. With the sharp eyes of a competitor "Germania" observed:

"The public can also realize now the end of the conflict, whether amicable or otherwise, CANNOT REMAIN WITHOUT REACTION ABROAD, ABOVE ALL UPON GERMAN COAL MINING. The coal crisis is primarily a market crisis... If, under the pressure of the employers, Britain draws this conclusion, it will seek the solution chiefly in the cheapening of production, viz., in the continuation of the subsidies, lengthening of the work-day, reduction of wages, or probably in a combination of these various possibilities. IN THIS CASE NEW FUEL IS ADDED TO THE ALREADY HOPELESSLY SHARPENED INTERNATIONAL COMPETITION THROUGH ATTEMPTED UNDERBIDDING WHICH CANNOT BUT BE CONTAGIOUS AND LET LOOSE THE SOCIAL STRUGGLE IN THE COMPETING COUNTRIES."

Thus the economic dilemma of the British capitalists is the following:

- (1) What will Britain do with its "superfluous" coal?
- (2) Or—what will Britain do with its "superfluous" unemployed miners?

If British capitalism curtails the amount of "superfluous" coal by restricting production, it increases the number of its unemployed, the number of "superfluous" miners. If, however, the wages of the miners are cut and the costs

of coal production are reduced, competition on the world market will again be sharpened, other countries' coal will be made "superfluous" and the rival countries will be driven to a reduction of wages and to intensified social conflicts. The reduction of wages in Germany, France and America means an intensified competitive power in these countries as against British coal, signifies therefore the menacing of the market areas for British coal upon a lower stage.

There is apparently no way out for a final solution of this great crisis for the British capitalist class.

Since, however, there is no such thing as a situation without an exit, the British employers also tried for some time the "third" road, the "truly British" way—that of compromise. In this case the compromise took the form of the granting of government subsidies. For nine months British mining was maintained at the expense of other sections of the British employing class and at the cost of the workers. If at all possible the British ruling class wanted to evade the social crisis in the mining industry. It even allowed the affair to cost it 21 million pounds sterling. But even the still powerful British economy could not bear this burden forever. In his speech in Parliament on May 3, 1926, Baldwin summed up the situation as follows:

"My difficulty was that the miners' representatives stated over and over again that they would not be prepared to consider any immediate reduction of wages or increase of hours, and that brought myself and colleagues to this position that if that were the case there would be no means of carrying on the industry without the aid of a continuation of the subsidy. So there we were. . . in exactly the position as we stood last July. WE COULD NOT CONTINUE TO PAY WAGES TO THE MINERS AND PROFITS TO THE MINE OWNERS AT THE EXPENSE OF THE GENERAL TAXPAYER." ("Times," May 4, 1926).

The reformist labor leaders, from Hodges to Brailsford, have realized that the British coal crisis cannot be solved on a narrow national scale, but that a real solution is possible only on an international basis. Hodges, the

Secretary of the Miners' International, and Brailsford, one of the leaders of the Independent Labor Party, made the proposal that the coal capitalists enter upon an international agreement so that the miners' wages and the conditions of labor and productivity of the various countries could be uniformly regulated in order to eliminate competition on the world market. It is characteristic that the Secretary of the Miners' International did not waste a single word concerning the international action of the miners; all that he had in mind was the international action of the mine owners. Brailsford, however, advocated a plan of an international capitalist trust in the name of socialist planned economy. The reformist gentlemen forgot only one little "detail," however: that the British coal crisis is not only unsolvable on a national scale, but likewise unsolvable upon a capitalist basis. The final solution of the coal crisis which will destroy neither the "superfluous" coal nor the "superfluous" workers is possible only on an international scale and upon a Socialist foundation. The capitalists had their choice of several ways, of course only within the limits of their national and capitalist possibilities. But at their cross-roads they met not the three fairies of Prosperity, Peace and Order, but instead the three witches of Macbeth, who foretold them illusory power and success—in reality misfortune and ruin.

The British bourgeoisie which for years has sought vainly for the solution to its greatest economic dilemma finds itself confronted also with a political dilemma. The restoration of its competitive power on the world market is a matter of life or death. For the realization of this goal there are two possibilities: one, the bringing about of a change in the relationship of forces on the world market; for under the given relationship of forces in which the various markets are jealously defended by the armies, navies and protective tariffs of the various powers, the British

ruling class can alter this balance of power only by means of war.

But the British capitalists are also conscious of the fact that they are not strong enough to wage a new European war. Even direct armed intervention in China, one of the last great reserves of the world market, is denied it through the jealousy of American imperialism.

The other possibility open to the British ruling class is that of a change in the relationship of forces within Great Britain itself. In other words: the increase and intrenchment of bourgeois power at the expense of the positions of the working class, by smashing its trade unions, by disrupting its battle lines.

THE BRITISH RULING CLASS ON THE WARPATH

AFTER protracted vacillation the British ruling class chose the second road. Since "Red Friday," the day of the victory of proletarian solidarity the employers methodically prepared for war against the workers.

The government decided to militarize the railwaymen.

A special police force was created.

Fascist organizations were founded.

Strikebreakers were recruited under the official name of "Organization for the Maintenance of Supplies." This organization was formed apparently independent of the government but the home minister, Joynson Hicks, in a speech in Liverpool declared: that when hearty men approach him with the declaration that they are ready to serve the country in time of need, he would be a fool to rebuff them.

This O. M. S. had the undivided support of the government and the employers and divided itself into the following five groups:

1. Voluntary special police troops for the protection of strike breakers.
2. Strike breakers in the factories.
3. Lorry drivers.
4. Messengers and cyclists.
5. General reserve.

Among the government's first war preparations must be included also the persecution and imprisonment of the Communists for which purpose there was dragged out a law formulated in 1797 against the British sailors who mutinied in the Napoleonic wars.

The Brighton congress of the Conservative Party took up the campaign against the rights of the trade unions all along the line.

In Parliament the Conservative Party introduced a so-called Economy Bill which was adopted despite the obstruction of a part of the Labor Party M. P.'s. It seeks to cut down the budget deficit at the expense of the working class by reducing the unemployment support and eliminating the sickness insurance.

On the economic field also the employers began their offensive. Four important centers crystallized in the economic struggle in the last months prior to the general strike:

1. The railway men.
2. The workers in the building trades.
3. The engineers.*
4. The miners.

These four big struggles showed important common features. In each of them the capitalists tried to put through their policy of "divide and rule." They played the skilled workers against the unskilled, the steady against the temporary, the better-paid strata against the lower paid. They played the lower wage scale of the engineers who were subject to extensive unemployment against the higher scale of the building trades workers. The British capitalists feared nothing so much as the unification of the working class; their entire tactic was directed principally to the maintenance and deepening of the old schisms and differentiations within the working class. In the miners' struggle also the employers tried to play one group of workers against the other. The big liberal capitalist paper, the "Manchester Guardian," itself stated that the report of the Royal Coal Commission had driven a wedge into the trade union phalanx by its proposal to continue the wages

*In England the machinists, etc., are called "engineers."

of the poorly paid categories of miners and the reduction of those of the better paid skilled categories:

"Labor opinion outside the miners is also nebulous and indeterminate. It is recognized that with EXTRAORDINARY SKILL THE COMMISSION HAS DRIVEN A WEDGE INTO THE TRADE UNION PHALANX OF LAST JULY. It is now no longer a question of merely resisting the impossible demands of the coalowners, but of discriminating between a carefully balanced scheme for the revision of the wage system in the coal industry and the reorganization of the structure of the industry in the direction which Labor has always laid down."

"The argument that the miners are being driven below the level of subsistence can no longer be presented with the same force when the other trade unions realize that even at their minimum the miners' wages have risen in about the same proportion, probably slightly more, than their cost of living, and that in respect to progress since the war mining is on the whole better off than the great exporting industries. ELSEWHERE—notably in engineering, shipbuilding and building—THE WAGES OF THE LOWER-PAID MEN HAVE ADVANCED SINCE THE WAR MUCH MORE RAPIDLY THAN THOSE OF THE HIGHER-PAID MEN. IN MINING THE GAP BETWEEN THE HIGHEST AND LOWEST PAID MAN (has been left) NEARLY AS WIDE AS EVER."

But not only by the playing of the better paid strata against the lower paid elements among the mine workers did the employers seek to blast the trade union phalanx, but also by the splitting up of the Miners' Federation.

One of the principal demands of the mining capitalists is that in the future no wage agreement be made on a national scale, but only by districts. One craft against the other, one wage category against the other, one district against the other: this was the tactic of the British employers throughout the entire preparatory period before the General Strike.

A systematic preparation—politically and on the economic battlefield—this characterized the attitude of the British ruling class from Red Friday until the big May struggle.

The spokesmen of the British capitalists really made no attempt to hide the fact that they wanted the struggle.

In innumerable declarations, speeches and articles they announced that without the reduction of wages and the lengthening of the work-day, without the restriction of the power of the unions, no "recovery" of British economic life was possible. The struggle for the reduction of the miners' wages and the smashing of the Miners' Federation signified for them only the first station in the forcing down of the standard of living of the entire British working class. The British ruling class wanted the fight, it prepared for the battle which its government consciously provoked at the same time that the leaders of the working class, the general council, fearfully evaded it.

The journalists hanging around the government building at 10 Downing Street on the eve of the General Strike were right when they declared:

"THE GENERAL COUNCIL OF THE TRADE UNIONS DOES NOT WANT A GENERAL STRIKE, BUT THE GOVERNMENT DOES."

THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE BRITISH WORKING CLASS

WE have endeavored to seek out the causes which explain why the British ruling class threw itself so resolutely into battle in the coal industry. The revelation of the militancy of the capitalists and of their government is however, not a sufficient explanation of why this great struggle really came about. A picture of the situation will be really complete only if we analyze also the position and attitude of the working class. Despite the determination and provocative attitude of the government the great battle would not have broken out if the British working class had still been the old, "sensible," reformist class of the past. The big surprise in the situation is precisely this uncommonly resolute fighting spirit on the part of the British proletariat. This militancy shows itself so irresistibly strong that it succeeded in breaking through all the traditions of the British labor movement and all the counter-machinations of the recognized, "tried" labor leaders.

In order to comprehend this fighting spirit of the British workers we must take into consideration the great deep-going changes in structure and composition which the British working class has undergone.

In the war and post-war period the British working class has gone through a levelling process. The great chasm which divided the British working class into a labor aristocracy and a genuine proletariat was disappearing more and more. The wages of the unskilled workers, as a result of the heavy demand for labor power during the war, rose relatively, while at the same time the wages of the

skilled workers were relatively lowered. Technical progress, the spread of machine production, but particularly the shortage of labor forces during the war have fostered the role of the unskilled masses of workers in production skilled strata. The following table shows how the relationship between the wages of skilled and unskilled workers has been shifting for years to the advantage of the latter:

INDUSTRIES	1914	1920	1922	1923	1924	1925
Masons	100	248	214	176	181	181
(Laborers)	100	324	254	198	205	206
Engineers	100	230	189	145	145	145
(Unskilled)	100	310	250	177	176	176
Dockers	100	253	192	127	144	144
(Unskilled)	100	308	248	169	188	168

This levelling process in the working class had a destructive effect upon the special interests of the various crafts. The equalization of interests had a deadening influence upon the old in-grown craft spirit and caused, step by step, the development of a feeling of class solidarity. The upsurge of the unskilled masses also opened the doors of the craft unions to these fresh currents of workers. The number of organized trade unionists was:

1913	4,133,000
1920	8,328,000
1923	4,300,000
1924	4,501,015

After the great boom in the British labor movement in the first post-war years millions of unskilled workers again left the trade unions, but the fact that they had once been trade union members remained, the feeling of solidarity between skilled and unskilled, organized and unorganized workers, nevertheless did not disappear. The decline of the labor aristocracy, the loss of the privileges of the upper strata of the working class, has on the other hand however, furnished a broad stratum of the leadership to the broad dissatisfied masses. Only the trade unions had the organizers, agitators, speakers and writers able to lead the masses. The unorganized masses had neither trade union

nor party leaders. By means of the amalgamation process the upper strata of the workers secured a rear guard in the extensive unskilled elements, while the proletarian masses produced organizers and leaders.

But not only the labor aristocracy was proletarianized during the last decades; the standard of living of the British working people as a whole was in a process of steadily decline. The sinking British Empire was no longer in a position to assure the old standard of living, the subsistence of the workers' customary living requirements.

In 1919-20 the British working class still enjoyed a period of wage increases and work-day reductions. Since 1921 however, the British proletariat has experienced an unbroken period of wage-cuts and lengthening of the work-day. The well-known reformist, Sidney Webb, in his article entitled, "The Crisis in British Industry," outlines the following picture:

"Since the highest level of 1920 the aggregate wages bill of the nation, in spite of an aggregate of wealth production equal to that of 1913, has fallen by AT LEAST SIXTY MILLION DOLLARS PER WEEK; AND THERE ARE HARDLY ANY SECTIONS OF WAGE-EARNERS WHO CAN TODAY BUY QUITE AS FULL A DINNER-PAIL AS THEY COULD IN 1913." ("Current History," October, 1925).

The chronic mass unemployment continues despite all the quackery of the MacDonald Labor Government and the reactionary measures of the Conservative Baldwin Cabinet. The number of unemployed varies between $1\frac{1}{4}$ and $1\frac{1}{2}$ million. It comprises between 10 and 12% of the organized workers but in all these fluctuations it maintains its mass character.

The number of the state-supported unemployed does not give a complete picture of the extent of unemployment and poverty in Great Britain. The gigantic army of the unemployed still finds its supplement in the army of the avowed "poor" who are enrolled upon the official lists. In October, 1925, official statistics indicated

that not less than 328,000 persons received this pauper support.

The capitalist politicians themselves view the situation with more and more hopelessness and concern. A speech by Lloyd George in the course of a parliamentary discussion on unemployment is characteristic:

"IT HAS HITHERTO BEEN HABITUAL TO LAY THE PROBLEM OF UNEMPLOYMENT TO TEMPORARY CAUSES AND HENCE TO PROPOSE TEMPORARY REMEDIAL MEASURES. Like all successful people we are optimists, but in this case optimism has carried us too far. We must from now on keep in view the fact that as a result of war and post-war conditions other countries were forced to build factories and produce commodities, which before the war they bought from Great Britain. Furthermore, the fall in currency has made it impossible for certain countries to buy our goods. When the currency was thereupon stabilized and people put into a position to buy goods, the governments hastened to shut out foreign competition by means of tariff walls. This is a permanent factor which we must now take into reckoning. Similarly with shipping. Formerly our share of world shipping amounted to 40/4, last year however, only 30%. With regard to our coal export, France and Italy are bit by bit withdrawing from our list of customers. ALL IN ALL: THERE IS NO USE IN DEALING WITH THIS WHOLE QUESTION AS A TEMPORARY DIFFICULTY. IT IS FUNDAMENTAL AND MUST BE DEALT WITH AS SUCH." (Re-translated).

And what is worst of all—for the capitalists—the workers are beginning to discover that their individual fates are the general rule, are beginning to hold the capitalist system itself responsible for poverty and want. Lloyd George, who, as a rule, keeps a keen ear to the ground for changes in mass sentiment, said in parliament, according to the "Times" of March 27, 1925:

"... Members who had read during the last few days the trade supplement of the 'Times,' the 'Manchester Guardian' and articles in the 'Daily News,' three newspapers of a very different character, would have found that they were all exceedingly pessimistic with regard to the future. . . .

"If the present situation went on he did not know what would happen. He did not agree that it was attributable to the system of capitalism, but unless a remedy was found, the working classes would believe it was due to that system. He was not taking a pessimistic view, but unless something was done there would inevitably be disaster."

These serious changes in the composition and objective situation of the British working class constitute the basis for a deep radicalization of the British proletariat. In a study of the "New Phenomena in the International Labor Movement,"* I attempted to summarize the most important signs of the radicalization of the British working class as follows:

"1. The growing activity of the working class. Since last autumn the trade union membership has been on the increase. The number of votes of the Labor Party has increased in all recent parliamentary by-elections and in local elections.

"2. The inner cohesion, the feeling of solidarity within the working class is growing. Important amalgamation moves are in process in the trade unions; strong tendencies prevail for the formation of the 'Industrial Alliance'; there is a general slogan: 'More power to the general council.'

"3. A general militancy reigns within the working class. 'Red Friday' registered the peak of this militancy, (the railway workers' agreement negotiated by Thomas met with stormy opposition (only 41 votes were cast in favor, among which were 15 paid employees of the union, as against 36 votes in opposition, the actual majority of the delegates).

"4. The trade union congress at Scarborough registered the victory of the left wing. Nor is the defeat of the left wing at the Labor Party Congress in Liverpool so serious if the voting record is analyzed, since in every delegation voting under unit rule there were strong minorities which favored the left policy.

"6. The left wing is organizing in various forms. The Minority Movement in the trade unions grows steadily; the left wing press springs up like mushrooms after a shower; the left wing is beginning to assume organized forms also in the Labor Party.

*Workers Monthly, April and May, 1926.

"7. Important alterations are in process in the workers' ideology. More and more, Socialist ideas permeate the proletariat which formerly did not go beyond the 'trade union ideology'; the question of extra-parliamentary revolutionary force is discussed for weeks in the entire working class press."

The government's preparations for the struggle have only deepened and hastened this process of radicalization. The differentiation between the right and left elements in the labor movement comes to an ever-sharper focus. In every important turn of the class struggle a bitter conflict broke out between right and left.

Most clearly was this differentiation shown in a comparison of the Scarborough Trade Union Congress with the Liverpool Congress of the Labor Party. The former was an open declaration of war against capitalist society:

"This Congress declares that the trade union movement must organize to prepare the trade unions in conjunction with the party of the workers to struggle for the overthrow of capitalism."

It demanded the launching of a movement for the formation of factory councils "to force the capitalists to relinquish their grip on industry." The congress declared in favor of the Anglo-Russian Unity Committees and for solidarity with the Russian workers. It advocated international trade union unity upon the basis of the struggle against capitalism. And finally—something hitherto unheard of in Britain, the classic land of imperialism—the congress adopted a red-hot resolution against British imperialism, against the British Empire built upon the blood of slaves—and declared for the "right of all peoples in the British Empire to self-determination, including the right to choose complete separation from the Empire."

The Trade Union Congress at Scarborough thereby declared war on capitalism.

Shortly afterward, however, there followed the Liverpool Congress of the Labor Party which declared war on

the Communists by expelling them from the Labor Party. Not only the Communists and the supporters of the Minority Movement, but the broad working masses recognized more and more, even before the outbreak of the great general strike, the necessity of economic mass action. Wheatley, former Minister of Health in the Labor Cabinet, was but a weak mouthpiece of the masses when he announced the hopelessness of isolated strikes and the need for the mass strike on a national strike:

"WE HAVE REACHED THE STAGE WHERE THE WITHHOLDING OF LABOR in which Mr. Bevin believes MUST BE NATIONAL TO BE SUCCESSFUL. . . . The successful strikes of the future must be class strikes. . . . faced with the prospect of this bloc of labor and bloc of capital, some of our friends shudder, and pray: 'Let this vision pass away from me.' But we must go on or get out. Trade unionism, except on a national scale, is now powerless. Unless we are willing to go back, the possibility of a NATIONAL STRIKE has to be faced. We are told it may lead to BLOODSHED. I sincerely hope it will not, but frankly fear it may. In such a gigantic conflict, and all that it implies, the capitalists of this country, in my opinion, would not hesitate to stave off defeat by the use of a few bullets." ("Daily Herald," September 7, 1925).

For months prior to the struggle, right wing leaders however, were attempting to hinder the formation of a trade union bloc and expressed themselves against the mass strike. MacDonald formulated the right wing viewpoint thus:

"There is at present much discussion about forming an alliance between the miners, railwaymen and metal workers. NO GREATER CALAMITY COULD BEFALL THE COUNTRY THAN THE FORMATION OF A TRADE UNION BLOC ON THE ONE SIDE AND A CAPITALIST BLOC ON THE OTHER FOR THE PURPOSE OF ENGAGING IN A SUICIDAL STRUGGLE. In my opinion, the miners should unite to demand their rights and to fulfill their duties towards society, and to appeal to the morals and reason of public opinion. We are all for peace, but this peace must not be purchased at the price of starving out the miners. That is the whole point. WE DO NOT WANT THE FIGHT. You know quite well how serious the situation is now. The economic situation is not good. The representatives of capital and labor should negotiate in order to avoid the strike."

Thomas, the head of the railwaymen and chief traitor

on "Black Friday," 1921, expressed himself even more clearly:

"I am frequently asked WHY THE ORGANIZED WORKING CLASS MUST NOT MAKE A MASS ATTACK ON THE CAPITALIST CLASS. My answer to this is that such an attack would not be only directed against the capitalist class, but against the whole of society. IN THE EVENT OF SUCH AN ATTACK BEING SUCCESSFUL IT MUST LOGICALLY LEAD TO THE ASSUMPTION OF GOVERNMENT BY THE MASSES. But I do not think that the mass of workers want to get to power by such back-stair methods. If the masses are not intelligent enough to get into power through the ballot box, they are still less capable to achieve this aim by violent means."

Thomas sought to scare the workers away from the mass struggle with the—really quite correct—argument, that the working class attack, if successful, must logically lead to the masses' taking over the government. But the masses no longer permitted themselves to be terrorized, they were imbued more and more with a will to power. For the first time in the history of the modern British labor movement the question of the use of force, of the arming of the working class, was openly discussed in newspapers and in meetings by the masses themselves.

We shall not cite the attitude of the Communists who of course, dealt with the question of force and arming with the clarity of the Marxist-Leninist method, but instead give the views of such centrist elements in the labor movement as reflected the attitude of the not-as-yet Communist but militant broad masses.

The left, generally pacifist sheet, "Lansbury's Labor Weekly," printed the following letter from a worker (Sept. 5, 1925):

"The plain lesson of my experiences is that we shall have to reckon with a really serious FASCIST MOVEMENT some day—PROBABLY AT THE NEXT BIG STRIKE, if not before. I would therefore plead earnestly with all who have the labor cause at heart that they prepare to meet this danger while they have still time. Force must be met by force. Fascism is purely and simply a military organizations, and is not amenable to argument. IT CAN ONLY BE SUCCESSFULLY COUNTERED BY A SIMILAR ORGANIZATION ON

THE OTHER SIDE. With luck, we shall have nine months to perfect our arrangements, so there is no time to be lost. The thing must be properly organized on a national basis, and I would propose that the T. U. C. GENERAL COUNCIL TAKE UP IMMEDIATELY THE CREATION OF A LABOR DEFENSE CORPS, centrally controlled, with local headquarters under each Trades Council. The Fascist organization is a splendid example for them to follow as regards details. The immediate objects of our Defense Corps would be:

- "1. Maintaining order at all working class public meetings.
- "2. Providing a permanent bodyguard of all labor leaders threatened by the attentions of the B. Fs.
- "3. Protecting strike pickets from Fascist violence."

The right trade union leader, Bevin, thereupon promptly replied with hostile pacifist arguments:

"The best way for killing Fascism is by ignoring it! The best way of keeping it alive and helping it to flourish is by Labor seeking to imitate it! If we attempt to take up arms in any way, I am quite sure we would be exactly playing the game of our opponents for them. . . . HIS POINT IS THAT STRIKES, DEMONSTRATIONS AND PASSIVE RESISTANCE ARE THE WEAPONS OF THE WORKING CLASS AND NOT ARMS AND CIVIL WAR." (Daily Herald, Aug. 24.)

The right leaders attempted to halt by all means the radicalization process of the British working class, but in vain. On the eve of the great struggle the masses were impregnated with the idea of solidarity, of the necessity of mass action and partially even with the will to power. "The declining curve of the British Empire corresponds with a rising line of the British labor movement.

Up to the last minute the right labor leaders sought to defend the interests of capitalism in the ranks of the workers; they sought to conciliate, to "negotiate"; but they concerned themselves in vain. The government was determined upon a fight and the proletarian masses were likewise in a militant mood.

For nine months the ruling class and the workers had prepared for this battle and thus at the beginning of May the clash was inevitable.

THE WORKING CLASS MARCHES UP

SLOWLY and painstakingly the mobilization of the proletarian forces proceeded, its tempo determined by the British union's traditional way of working, still largely taken from guild times.

The report of the Royal Coal Commission was made public on March 11th. The capitalist press, the Conservatives and Liberals, government and mineowners, immediately rallied around the standard of the Coal Commission Report—but for weeks the workers lost their voices. The only reply from the official labor movement to the publication of the Coal Report was a deep general silence. It took weeks before the various executive committees and delegate bodies took up the question of the workers' alliance. The alliance of the miners, transport workers, iron-steel workers, and metal workers (unions with a combined membership of 1,600,000) was at last laboriously established. The National Union of Railwaymen, under the leadership of the notorious Thomas, rejected the solidarity alliance and its executive refused to undertake a referendum of the membership.

The revolutionary Minority Movement was the first factor in the British labor movement to find its voice. On March 21, there met the National Conference of the Minority Movement, comprising delegates of a million workers, i. e., almost a fourth of the organized workers of Great Britain. Genuine revolutionary militancy marked the gathering, but it could only call for the battle, it could not itself declare the war, much less organize it, for it is but a Minority Movement and not an official organ of the labor movement.

Only on March 25 did the executive of the Miners' Federation refer the Coal Commission report to the districts for their opinion. Only on this day did matters come for the first time to a joint session of the Industrial Committee of the General Council and the Executive of the Miners' Federation. On April 9, the special delegate conference of the miners met, which, however, still made no binding decisions but merely submitted recommendations to the districts.

It took a new offensive step on the part of the mine burrows (on April 17), announcing at the mines the lay-off of the miners on April 20, to move the organs of the labor movement to new steps. On the day of the mineowners' lockout threat MacDonald and Henderson entered the Industrial Committee of the General Council on behalf of the Labor Party Executive.

A special national conference of all trade union executives met on April 29. On this day also there was still no talk of a declaration of war. The resolution merely spoke of supporting the "General Council's efforts to assure an honorable settlement." The National Conference still restricted itself to the modest demand for the recall of the lockout on the part of the mineowners. At this National Conference 200 trade unions were represented by over a thousand delegates, but the great gathering which represented the entire organized labor movement of Great Britain, dared neither to show the government its power nor release the struggle of the broad masses.

The stubbornness of the miners, fighting for their lives, then sets the avalanche into motion. On April 30, the miners finally reject the terms of the employers. The situation is very tense for two-thirds of the miners are already locked out by the employers. At midnight of April 30, the miners' strike is proclaimed—the first army corps of the workers' army goes into battle.

The mobilization of the proletarian army, although proceeding slowly, nevertheless goes forward. On May 1, the General Council of the Trade Union Congress is forced to submit a memorandum to the National Conference of Trade Union Executives announcing the beginning of the general strike in support of the miners for midnight of May 3.

The mobilization mechanism is still moving very cumbersomely. The National Conference of Trade Union Executives endorses the memorandum but first refers it for confirmation and decision to special conferences of the various executives of the 200 participating trade unions. One and a quarter million miners are already locked out or on strike, but the supporting columns of the proletarian masses are still unable to move because first, there must be held the 200 conferences of the 200 executives of the 200 trade unions.

Finally, the 200 brooklets of the 200 trade union executives flow together in the great stream of the National Conference of Trade Union Executives, which, by a vote of 3,653,000 against 50,000 decides upon the proclamation of the general strike.

This cumbersome, dragging mobilization of the proletarian army presents a peculiar picture.

The mobilization orders do not issue from above, from the General Council, but they come from below, from the broad masses.

Only now, after hundreds of meetings have spoken, does the general staff of the British labor movement, the General Council of the Trade Union Congress, make its appearance on the battle-field.

The General Council instructed the transport workers, railwaymen, printers, metal workers, building workers, and electrical workers to stop work. It at the same time declared however, that its announcement was only a general

instruction, and that the actual starting of the strike can take place only upon the special order of each individual trade union. The General Council calls upon all local Trade Councils to maintain law and order, it warns the workers not to leave their areas during the strike or to take any other work. The General Council pledges not to call off the general strike until the interests of all participating trade unions are beyond danger. Finally, the General Council calls upon all unions affiliated with the Trade Union Congress, as well as those not affiliated, to bestow full power upon it for the conduct of the struggle. This announcement of the General Council meant that after the army of the proletarian millions had formed itself it also found its leadership, the General Council was ready to take over the role of the General Staff of the working class army.

The first war measure of the General Council was the launching—of new peace negotiations with the government.

Then came the affair of the "Daily Mail." The ultra-conservative "Daily Mail" wanted to publish an editorial headed "For King and Country." The article stated that the general strike was not an industrial struggle, but a political strike, a revolutionary movement. The battle of the trade unions was directed "against our wives and children"—thus the hysterical shrieks of the Conservative paper—"it must be smashed with all means at the disposal of the community." The article was written, but then something happened that was unprecedented in Great Britain: the printers refused to set up the article! Nothing shows more clearly the transformation of Old England than this interference of the workers with the ancient and honorable bourgeois "freedom of the press." And at that from a stratum of workers who are members of a trade union with a guild past of two centuries. Thereupon came the Government's ultimatum which ended as follows:

"Such action involves a challenge to the constitutional rights and freedom of the nation. His Majesty's Government therefore before it can continue negotiations must acquire from the Trade Union Committee both a repudiation of the actions referred to that have already taken place and AN IMMEDIATE AND UNCONDITIONAL WITHDRAWAL OF THE INSTRUCTIONS FOR A GENERAL STRIKE."

Upon this warlike ultimatum of the government the General Council replied with a declaration of peace. It regretted that the government's ultimatum had destroyed the efforts to bring about peace.

The miners, however, took up the government's gage of battle in grim earnest; their executive decided to empower the General Council to conduct the negotiations also in the name of the miners. The General Council received dictatorial power over the proletarian army. We shall see further on how the Council made use of these dictatorial powers. For the time being it had to give free reign to events. On midnight of May 3 the general strike had become a fact.

THE STRIKE IS ON

The trade union organs went into motion slowly and clumsily. The cumbersome apparatus of the unions moves that way. But once the mobilization order reached the broad masses vitality and action entered upon the scene. When the command got down to the privates of the working class army, its effect was like the touch of a magician's wand. On May 4 the broad general strike front, millions strong, was already arrayed.

The General Council did not throw the whole working class into the struggle at one time but only the forward ranks. The following categories of organized labor were the first to be called out on a strike:

Miners	840,000
Railwaymen	464,000
Transport Workers	412,000
Locomotive Drivers and Firemen	60,000
Building Workers	60,000
Woodworkers	110,000
Metal Workers	96,000
Electrical Workers	21,000
Seamen	60,000
Carpenters	55,000
Civil Employees	320,000
Printers	70,000
Sheetmetal Mechanics	140,000

Inasmuch as the stoppage of work by the organized miners forced the idleness of all workers the general strike already included four million workers on the first day. The tactic of the General Council aimed at paralyzing, during the first days of the strike, only those industries which possessed strategic importance. To the General Council raw material, coal and transport were the most strategically important positions. Its plan was based upon the premise

that if coal, raw material and transport were lacking the other industries must also gradually come to a standstill.

England presented a peculiar picture during the general strike. The economic consequences of 4-5 million workers laying down their tools showed themselves more and more forcefully.

What was this picture?

The mines are idle.

Transport is paralyzed.

The docks are deserted; they look as if a plague had swept them of all living things—so wrote a newspaper reporter.

Railway traffic is stilled. To be sure the government announces the despatch of a few hundred trains but what does this demonstration amount to in the face of the fact that normally tens of thousands of trains are in service? True enough, the government is finding "volunteers," not, however, out of the ranks of the working class, but from among the bourgeoisie and middle class. If a few trains are moving it is not due to the betrayal of the railwaymen, but to the voluntary emergency service of the technicians and higher officials. And it would have been a miracle if in such a thoroughly industrial country as Great Britain the government had not found a few ten thousands of technicians and officials ready to be employed as strike breakers in the struggle against the workers. The government makes no attempt to begin work in the mines; but the honor of the railwaymen also is untarnished, the executive of the railwaymen's union had a full right to announce to their members: "The strike is carried out 100%. Hold your own, you cannot do better."

Street traffic in the tremendous metropolis of London is stopped. The government may brag about the running of a few dozen omnibuses; it forgets to report however, that these lorries are driven by militarized chauffeurs who

must be protected with barbed wire from the anger of the workers.

The capitalist press—the lie factory—is shut down.

The government boasts that about 40 provincial papers are appearing "in emergency editions," but it forgets to add that in normal times two thousand provincial papers appear in England.

The British Isles have now become truly insular. Maritime transport with the continent is cut off. The old truth of the proud imperialist song: "Britannia rules the waves" has been given the lie by the power of the general strike.

The imperial structure is beginning to give way: the Postmaster General is compelled to announce that the post is unable to accept packages for the colonies and abroad. The German post administration also announced the suspension of the acceptance of letter for Great Britain.

In the British Parliament, the mother of all parliaments, the speaker must explain, with deepest moral indignation, that Parliament can no longer print its minutes because the printers are on strike and that it must do without electric light because the electrical workers will furnish no current.

The more the strike progresses the tighter becomes the position of the bourgeoisie and the more the militancy of the workers mounts. A telegram from Methil states: "Pits, docks, railways, trams, busses out 100%. Committee of Action in full control of situation. Strikers' spirit indomitable."

But not only the strike bulletins spread such news but the official Reuter reports of the government radio are forced to admit this truth. On May 7 the official British indlogram announced:

"Although in isolated instances strikes have resumed work there is on the whole little change in the general situation. THE STRIKE OF THE MINERS AND RAILWAYMEN CONTINUES TO BE PRACTICALLY SOLID."

On May 8, the government radio reported:

"No marked change in the strike situation has occurred. THE STRIKE IS STILL GENERAL THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY."

Already on the fifth day its effect begins to extend to the other industries not involved in the direct frontline of the strike. The lack of raw material, the stoppage of transport and shortage of coal begins to make itself felt also in the other industries. On May 8, the official Reuter report announced:

"A NUMBER OF FACTORIES ARE BEGINNING TO FEEL THE LACK OF RAW MATERIAL. They are closing down or restricting work. This includes the Northampton boot factories."

And a government radio states:

"Lack of fuel is handicapping some of the mills and factories in the industrial areas."

The strike also begins to affect the matter of food supplies. To be sure the government has ordered the milk dealers to deliver their milk to a central milk station; and the merchants have pledged themselves not to raise prices above the pre-strike levels. But milk prices go up just the same. Meat prices also rise to such a menacing height that the government is compelled to fix maximum prices for meat. In growing terror British capitalism views the unshakable front of the general strike and its heart—the stock exchange—begins to beat wildly: the market tumbles and even the pound sterling, restored to gold parity at such great sacrifices, sinks.

The sentiment of the masses of workers in the first days of the general strike was marked chiefly by a tremendous enthusiasm, at the same time also by unrestrained jollity. The first feeling of the masses is that they are freed from the yoke of exploitation. Hundreds of thousands of workers stroll the streets; as a reporter puts it, "there is a real holiday spirit." The strikers even look upon the police sent against them with more contempt than bitterness. Contemptuously they tell the police: "Well,

they send soldiers to protect you fellows, maybe you should make for wet-nurses!" Jokingly the workers tell one another: "The first two years of this strike will be the hardest, after a while it will be quite easy."

But after the first few hours of joy and exuberance there set in the serious activity of the masses.

Local committees of action arise everywhere. The General Council begins to organize its work. It divides itself into five sub-departments:

1. Transport and connections.
2. Publicity.
3. Food supplies.
4. Powers and instructions.
5. Ways and means.

After a brief silence there appears also the central organ of the strikers, the "British Worker." The General Council organizes its own transport department. A great park of automobiles and lorries is at its disposal. The legend: "General Council—transport" exempts them from the control of the strike pickets. The bulletins of the General Strike furnish, every two or three hours, the latest news from the battlefield.

A closely woven net of courier service is spun out over the entire country. With the aid of the Transport Workers' Union the General Council's "Sub-Commission on Transport and Connections," organizes the despatch of speakers, agitators, instructors, and published material.

Every trade union issues its own daily bulletin, and passes on the instructions received every two or three hours from the General Council. The Local Trades Council also have their own bulletins and their own liaison service. The Local Section Committees are also divided into various sub-committees parallel with those of the General Council, sub-committees for food supply, publicity, defense, pickets, etc. Hundreds of mimeographed strike newspapers are

issued. The organization of the masses, the traditional organization spirit of the British workers, justifies itself wonderfully in this battle. The organization spirit also grips the unorganized masses and in some towns and among some elements of the unorganized workers masses of new fighters join with the trade unions.

With the progress of the strike, with the employment of the government volunteers, the strike breakers, police and military formations, there comes a change also in the attitude of the masses. In the place of the harmless jollification and holiday spirit there enters a grim determination and bitterness. The scab omnibuses are attacked and overturned. Clashes occur in practically every major town in Britain. In York the enraged workers threw the police in front of the railway trains and in this way stopped traffic. In Leeds three thousand workers lay down on the tracks and halted the trains with their bodies. Between the towns of Poplar and Canning the street was occupied by a living wall of a hundred thousand workers who made all traffic impossible by their vast mass. It was no bluff when Jack Jones, Labor M. P., declared in Parliament: "In the workers' quarters of London there are 400,000 people who have come back from the war and who, with their backs to the wall, are firmly determined to put up a new fight." The Young Communist League manifesto gave this embittered militancy of the masses its best expression in the slogan: "Fight like hell to win!"

THE BOSSES MOBILIZE

THE mobilization of the forces of the capitalists and their government was accomplished at a far more rapid tempo than that of the proletarian forces. The employers and their government were much more thoroughly prepared for the struggle. The official leadership of the labor movement had really made no use whatever of the nine months from Red Friday until the First of May for any serious preparation. The government, however, had girded itself for the fight. And already on the eve of the struggle its long-prepared measures were revealed. It became clear that already in the autumn of last year the government had secretly sent out the circular announcing the state of emergency. It was seen that the strike breaker organization, the O. M. S., had ready its posters announcing the state of emergency and calling upon every loyal citizen to register for strikebreaking. A confidential circular of the Conservative Party Executive was published somewhat prematurely. The circular was intended to influence public opinion on behalf of the lengthening of the miners' workday. One may recall that already on January 18, a London paper, the "Evening Standard," announced on "authoritative information" from "government circles," that the plans of the government in case of national need were complete, and should they unfortunately have to be applied they would be, with the full power of the state, in the interests of the public.

Yes, the government was conducting negotiations and it was certainly ready to conclude peace—but only on its own terms, that is, if the miners would accept the wage

cut, the longer hours and the smashing of the unions as terms of peace.

But it was likewise ready from the very beginning, to wage the struggle, and this explains the dragged out course of the negotiations. The Liberal "Manchester Guardian" openly charged that the government did not seriously desire an agreement, that the premier was but engaged in "leisurely intervention" in the negotiations.

The change of tactic of the capitalist press was remarkable. Immediately after the publication of the Royal Coal Commission report the overwhelming majority of the press expressed the opinion that a continuation of the subsidy was inevitable. All at once, however, as if at a command, in the middle of April the capitalist press changed front and declared itself against the continuation of the subsidy and for the inevitable reduction of the miners' wages.

Even such radical liberal papers as "The Nation" wrote (April 17, 1926):

"Wage reductions and fairly substantial wage reductions, are an inevitable feature of a settlement."

The employers and their government wanted the fight, wanted to come to a reckoning with the working class, and had prepared for the struggle.

Joynton Hicks, the Home Secretary of the Baldwin Cabinet, who is generally telling tales out of school, already on April 16 spoke of the "war prospects" as follows:

"Without exaggeration I believe that the anxiety of ministers today is greater than the anxiety of ministers during the war period, because then the whole nation was united whereas today the position is different. THERE IS THE PROSPECT—I would almost say OF WAR—the prospect of a great difference of opinion and of a great disturbance in the body politic, and the nation is not united now, as it was in regard to the Great War." (Daily Telegraph, April 17, 1926.

"Prospects of War"—declares the Home Secretary of the Baldwin Cabinet. What is more natural than that the

government should make all war preparations and adapt itself to a state of war?

Eye-witnesses who went through these critical days in England report that this feverish attitude was not unlike that prevailing during the first days of August, 1914. In whirlwind tempo step followed step and blow followed blow as the government mobilized its forces.

The Royal Proclamation announces the state of emergency.

The government divides the country into ten districts, at the head of which are Cabinet Ministers in the capacity of Civil Commissioners.

Coal consumption is rationed.

Prohibition of electric advertising.

Appeal for the saving of gas and electricity.

Embargo on coal exports.

Coal transports already on the open seas are recalled by wireless.

The Government sends reliable troops to the industrial areas, to Lancashire, South Wales and Scotland.

Hyde Park, the "Jung of London," is closed to the public and turned into the central depot for milk distribution.

Recruiting bureaus for volunteers are established.

The Atlantic Fleet, which was to set out an man-o-uvers on May 4, is put into a state of readiness.

Decree: in case of the non-appearance of newspapers, reports will be transmitted by radio.

The British Government notifies the foreign powers: Foreign ships may land only with vitally necessary cargoes since they cannot be coaled.

Government decree: Post will be carried by military planes.

Government decree: Warships will replace the post steamer service.

Censorship of telegrams instituted.

The police are authorized to forbid meetings and arrest "suspicious" persons.

The air-fleet is put in readiness.

The Cabinet decrees the mobilization of special police.

All army furloughs are recalled.

Every regiment is instructed to be ready to march within two hours.

The railways are put under government control for the period of the strike.

The "independent" organization, the O. M. S., publicly puts itself at the disposal of the government.

The Emergency Law bestows dictatorial power upon the government: all vehicles and means of transport, railways, ships, can be requisitioned; land, buildings and material can be seized; the harbors may be closed and all export prohibited.

"Prospects of War"—declared Joynson Hicks on April 16. On May 3 the war was here and on the same day also the state of war. And, as is proper in time of war, all ruling class factions immediately concluded civil peace. Liberals like Lord Oxford and Lord Grey without delay formed a united front with Conservatives inside and outside of the government.

DEMOCRACY TURNS INTO DICTATORSHIP.

ON an increasing scale the ruling class sets all its weapons into motion. First the government exhausts all "peaceful" weapons of the State against the general strike. It mobilizes the entire arsenal of its propaganda, still notorious from the world war. The Parliament pours out all its conservative and Liberal moral indignation against the striking workers. All ideological means of intimidation and terrorism are applied by the government. Day and night it repeats that the strike is really not an economic strike, but a revolutionary action. But, remarkably enough, the British workers are not at all frightened by this new aspect of the struggle.

From the ideological combating of the strike the government proceeds to the juridical. A full-fledged juristic offensive is organized. First from "below." The Conservative "Times" issues the slogan: The General Strike is no economic strike, it is illegal. One must proceed against it, with all forces. Sir John Simon, a Liberal M. P., the "famous lawyer," appears in Parliament with a great speech on the illegality of the General Strike. And the notorious bureaucrat and professional betrayer of the Seamen's Union, Havelock Wilson, completes the trinity. In the name of "his" union he demands the throttling of the general strike by means of the legal noose. What a remarkable coincidence of these "lofty spirits" who thus simultaneously and independently of each other hatch out this juristic conspiracy against the workers' front.

The "pro-labor" barrister naturally found the best,

most cunning formulas, most typical of the spirit of capitalist laws:

"A strike properly understood was perfectly legal. Every workman had a right to withdraw his labor after proper notice to his employer.

"This general strike was not a strike at all. The decision of the Council of the Trades Unions' Executive to call out everybody regardless of the CONTRACTS which these workmen had made was not a lawful act.

"Workers who had come out voluntarily or otherwise had BROKEN THE LAW.

"They were taking part in an UTTERLY ILLEGAL PROCEEDING. Every WORKMAN out in disregard of his contract was himself PERSONALLY LIABLE to be sued in the county court for damages.

"Every TRADE UNION OFFICIAL who had advised and prompted that course of action was liable to damages to the uttermost farthing of his personal possessions.

"No trade union could deprive a member of his benefits because he refused to obey an illegal order to strike. No court in the land would uphold a rule that a person would forfeit his benefits if he was forced to do that which was wrong and illegal."

As we see the plan was quite simple and as "legal" as only a counter-revolutionary plan can be. They wanted to declare simply that the general strike is illegal because the workers did not give due notice to the employers of the abrogation of their contract. It was intended to establish in the courts that not only each trade union, but even every trade union official and every individual trade union member was personally and financially liable for the damages caused by the strike. The plan was devilishly simple. It was not intended to declare the trade unions themselves illegal but "only" their actions. The strike treasuries were not to be seized at once, but they were to be forbidden to pay out strike benefits for the illegal strike. The fiction that in Great Britain every wage worker has the right to belong to a trade union and to strike when and where he likes was to be maintained, it was "only" to be explained however, that the general strike was not a "proper" strike, that it was a "new and utterly illegal ac-

tion." The millions of striking workers were not to be imprisoned for the government did not have that many prisons, but they wanted to hold all trade union officials personally liable; it was intended to garnish their wages and to terrorize the rank and file railway workers by taking away their little homes and gardens.

And it did not remain merely a plan. The ruling class not only found its "famous lawyer" to hatch out the juristic plan with all the finesse of legality; it also had in readiness its honorable judge to sign the verdict as well as the scabby trade union traitor to lodge the complaint in court. Judge Astbury of the High Court (Chancery division) on May 10 declared the general strike an illegal strike and thereby outlawed every trade union and every trade unionist. As proudly reported by the official Reuter despatch, the capitalist judge delivered the verdict on the basis of a complaint by Havelock Wilson, the trade union leader:

"Underlying the Astbury decision is a motion by the National Sailors' and Firemen's Union of Great Britain for an injunction against the secretaries and other officials of certain trade union branches restraining them from calling upon their members to strike or leave their employment contrary to the rules of the union."

After the general strike was declared illegal there began an incitement on the part of the capitalist press which demanded new and sharper measures from the government. "The Times" on May 11 advocated the stoppage of unemployment support. Now that there was work enough in the country why spend the millions of pounds sterling for unemployment support? "The Daily Mail" raised the question of why the further functioning of the General Council should be tolerated and shrieked for the immediate dissolution of the General Council. The political correspondent of the "Daily Mail" already on May 11 reported that a large part of the Conservative M. P.'s raised the demand for the expulsion of all Soviet Union organizations from England.

And this baiting was not in vain. The government ordered the requisitioning of newsprint paper for its own official strike-breaker organ. It made use of its dictatorial powers to issue a prohibition against the transmission of money orders from abroad "which serve purposes directed against public safety and the life of the community."

This meant: No paper for the workers' strike organ, and the holding back of material support to the struggle on the part of the international working class.

The capitalist class was carrying on ambitiously! At the stroke of a pen four million workers were put outside the pale of the law! One and one-quarter million workers were to be robbed, illegally, of their unemployment doles.

Courts, laws, and the lash of hunger: all these were not yet enough. Side by side with its ideological and juridical means of terrorism the government also mobilized its army, navy, air fleet, police reserves, O. M. S., and voluntary units, in full war equipment even to their steel helmets marched along the banks of the Thames; how sixty-six military lorries loaded with infantry, as well as cavalry detachments in their most complete battle regalia were sent to Poplar, London's famous proletarian suburb.

But it is noteworthy that this naked marshalling of soldiery missed fire: the workers are not so easily terrorized. The British government gets the feeling more and more that its professional army alone is inadequate against this vast mass movement. It must smash the workers by means of organized forces of the bourgeoisie itself. It appeals to the "spontaneity" of the capitalist class—but, although so famed for ingrained class consciousness this British ruling class by no means rushes to the "banners of capitalist society." Joynton-Hicks, the miniature Mussolini of England, wails in Parliament like an old woman that the volunteers are not presenting themselves in masses,

and calls upon all capitalist elements to enroll in support of the government in greater numbers.

The strike is on. The economic consequences of the general strike become more and more evident from day to day. The militancy of the workers is mounting.

The preparation of forcible measures by the government is no longer capable of intimidating the strikers. The British government sees the time approaching when it must openly and relentlessly apply the last measures of state power, the full force of its armed strength.

The Government announces its intentions in the official report of May 7th:

"NEVERTHELESS, AS WAS EXPECTED, THE SITUATION IS BECOMING MORE INTENSE AND THE CLIMAX IS NOT YET REACHED."

And a second official government announcement on the same day reads:

"An organized attempt is being made to starve the people and wreck the State and THE LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL ASPECTS ARE ENTERING UPON A NEW PHASE."

What is the meaning of this declaration?

Briefly and to the point, nothing else than the announcement of the active application of the armed forces of state power. Since May 7, the government's military preparations have been becoming more and more menacing. First it has parliament extend the boundaries of its already dictatorial emergency powers, in order to "proceed against every person found at or in the vicinity of particularly threatened places, and discovered under circumstances which indicate the probability that they are there for an illegal purpose." (Retranslated).

The Government declares pompously that all who render strike-breaking service will, upon the conclusion of the strike, be defended and protected by all means at the dis-

posal of the state, if necessary with new laws and penalties against persecution on the part of the trade unions.

The government radio transmits instructions to all soldiers that they may shoot down strikers without fear of consequences:

"All ranks of the armed forces of the Crown are hereby notified that ANY ACTION which they may find it necessary to take in an honest endeavor to aid the Civil Power will receive, both now and afterwards, the full support of his Majesty's Government." ("British Gazette," No. 4.)

Every soldier and every officer of the British army is authorized by this government decree to shoot down any worker. Not even apparently is he to be bound by the laws, since henceforth his own "honest endeavor" will determine whether or not his rifle is to be employed. This ukase means the setting aside of the British law which provides that any soldier who uses his gun to shoot down a person is accountable in court even though he did so in obedience to a command.

Not since the World War has England undertaken such large-scale military preparations as at present—never since the World War was the rule of the British bourgeoisie so threatened as now. The government in its communique plumes itself that "the spirit of the troops is excellent." Reuter reports that the number of "volunteers" already reaches 325,000. An entirely new arm of service is created in the so-called "Civil Police Reserve," fitted out with steel helmets and rubber clubs and recruited exclusively from ex-soldiers. One after another the fine green parks of London are turned into military camps. The famed British sport turns into earnest. In the place of the racing boats, the war-craft of His Majesty appear in the rivers and harbors. In the place of the famous horse-racing there appear detachments of mounted police. Even had the government not been determined to smash the workers' front with military forces the massing of all these means of war in itself created the possibility of

bloody clashes. Robert McNeil, Cabinet Minister, was right when he stated in a letter to a mass meeting in Canterbury:

"Every day that the conflict lasts increases the danger of violence which can only be met with the armed forces of the Crown, and the consequence of which can in no way be foreseen.".. (Retranslated).

This mobilization of the forces of the government signified the final end of "Merrie Old England." A new, plummy England arises before our eyes. A new ruling class, no longer employing the means of concessions, pliability and elasticity—and a new proletariat, no longer a working class bribed by the imperialist bourgeoisie.

And the more the working class shows its proletarian, its revolutionary aspect—the more the British capitalists reveal their true, their bourgeois face. The British ruling class has also heretofore ordered the struggling masses to be fired upon—in India, Egypt, in the colonies. But not for decades has it dared to turn rifles against its own citizenry. For the first time in generations the British ruling class was determined to have English workers shot down. Matters did not go that far, but that this was so is due not to the government, but to the ignominious end of the general strike.

THE GERMS OF DUAL GOVERNMENT.

THE great battle began as a simple wage struggle on the part of the miners. In its first phase it raised only the questions of wages, hours and trade union rights. But when the general strike mobilized the entire working class, or at least its most decisive sections, in support of the mine workers, and when the capitalists directed all forces of state power against the general strike, the struggle entered upon its second phase: **The wage fight turned into a struggle for power.** The economic strike was transformed into a political strike. Now it was no longer a case of one group of employers facing a certain group of employees, but one of capitalists versus workers, in other words: class against class.

In the absence of any conscious desire on the part of the laboring masses, and against the conscious will of the right labor leaders, the general strike raised the question of power. Even though it did not apply to the labor leaders, it certainly did fit the gigantic upsurge of the general strike when Baldwin declared in Parliament, at the outset of the strike:

"They are threatening the basis of orderly government, they are nearer to proclaiming civil war than they had been for centuries past." ("Morning Post," May 4.)

The keen-eyed reported of the big American daily: "Philadelphia Public Ledger," on the second day of the strike, telegraphed his paper:

"The cheerful temper of the average citizen, in sharp contrast to the bitterness of the workers, discloses the fact that England is much closer to a revolution than ever before."

The trade union leaders certainly did not want the revolution—God save the mark!—they did not even want

the general strike, nor, in the last analysis did they want the whole battle. Lord Grey, erstwhile secretary for foreign affairs, was right when he stated that it was no desire on the part of the leaders that conjured up this menace:

"The general strike has raised an issue in which the question of the miners' strike is submerged. The issue now is not what the wages of the miners should be but **WHETHER DEMOCRATIC PARLIAMENTARY GOVERNMENT IS TO BE OVERTHROWN.** It is by this democratic government that liberty has been won, and by this alone can it be maintained. The only alternatives are Fascism or Communism. . . **IT MAY WELL BE THAT THE MAJORITY OF THOSE WHO DECREED THE GENERAL STRIKE DID NOT INTEND and do not desire to overthrow parliamentary government but their action has threatened it.**"

The trade union leaders were at once appalled by the gigantic dimensions and revolutionary vigor of the movement. When the movement set in with irresistible force it seemed for a time as though the miserable apprentice-magicians would no longer be able to control the spirits they had conjured up. In one explanation after another they protested their loyalty, swore their innocence, and again and again emphasized the pure and simple industrial character of the general strike. Already the first issue of the "British Worker," the official strike organ, contained the following statement of the General Council to all the workers: "The General Council of the Trades Union Congress wishes to emphasize the fact that this is an industrial dispute."

The General Council summarizes its whole arsenal of defensive arguments in the following remarkable declaration which appeared in the official organ, "British Worker," No. 5, May 9:

"THE GENERAL COUNCIL DOES NOT CHALLENGE THE CONSTITUTION.

"It is not seeking to replace unconstitutional government.

"Nor is it desirous of undermining our Parliamentary institutions.

"The sole aim of the Council is to secure for the miners a decent standard of life.

"The Council is engaged in an industrial dispute. 'In any settlement, the only issue to be decided will be an industrial issue, not political, not constitutional. THERE IS NO CONSTITUTIONAL CRISIS.'"

But the bosses knew better. They again and again emphasized the political character of the struggle and recognized clearly that the contest must inevitably give rise to a constitutional crisis. Baldwin's very first speech in Parliament stated:

"This was no attack on the wages of the country. . . but a moment chosen to upset the existing Constitution." ("Morning Post," May 4).

Parliament and parliamentary government—these are in danger—that was the next slogan of the employers. Baldwin sounded the tocsin on May 6:

"Constitutional government is being attacked. . . The laws of England are the people's birthright. The laws are in your keeping. You have made Parliament their guardian. THE GENERAL STRIKE IS A CHALLENGE TO PARLIAMENT AND IS THE ROAD TO ANARCHY AND RUIN." ("British Gazette," No. 2, May 6).

The government's official strikebreaking organ, "The British Gazette," which was to replace the entire suspended capitalist press, in its very first issue put the question with great clearness when it declared that should this strike last some weeks it would ruin British prosperity for as many years. Foreign competitors would steal the markets. Unemployment would grow to an unprecedented degree. The trade union leaders merely want to force the government to continue the subsidy but that would be as futile as to attempt to quench someone's thirst with salt water. Were Parliament to accede to this it would only bring on a worse disaster than the strike, because this would show that the general strike is irresistible. Thereby governmental power would slip from the hands of Parliament. Negotiations are possible on the stoppage of the coal strike, but not concerning the general strike.

And the "British Gazette" also drew its conclusions from this analysis:

"THE GENERAL STRIKE IS NOT A CONFLICT BETWEEN EMPLOYERS AND WORKERS, IT IS A CONFLICT BETWEEN TRADE UNION LEADERS AND PARLIAMENT. That conflict must only end, can only end, in a decisive and unmistakable victory of Parliament. This victory His Majesty's Government is definitely resolved to secure."

The government organ was correct: the victory of the general strike would have been a defeat of the bourgeois parliament, of the capitalist government. It was right in holding that the conflict was not one between employers and workers, it had grown into a conflict between the working class and the capitalist state power. Hence this capitalist state power was forced to marshal all its weapons to effect the unconditional defeat of the movement. But for this very reason the workers' only chance for success was the application by the General Council of every weapon at its disposal in order to achieve victory. From the first minute of the strike the capitalists and their government realized that the general strike is a political battle, and consequently fought the workers with all political and military forces. The leaders of the general strike however looked upon the movement as an ordinary wage struggle and continued to fight the capitalists as employers after the whole situation had already changed, after the capitalists as a class, headed by their central executive committee, the government, had taken the field.

The simple wage struggle turned into a gigantic political general strike. But the heads of the movement still endeavored to force the giant into the outgrown baby clothing. The capitalists characterized the strike as a political strike, the crisis as a political crisis, the struggle as one of workers against capitalists, thereby stating what was so. Thereby they entrenched themselves in an impregnable position. The trade union leaders talked about a purely wage dispute, denied the class character of the movement, declared their loyalty towards the government and especially towards Parliament, and asseverated their stand on the basis of the constitution, thus concealing the

true state of affairs from the workers, and surrendering the strongest posts of their movement.

The leaders of the general strike continued to dispute the political character of the movement, and persisted in denying—like a schoolboy his misdeeds when called to account by his teacher—the political character of the movement, even after the strike leadership in certain respects was already exercising governmental functions. The General Council regulated the production and traffic of the country—are not these the functions of a government? The General Council, as the Central Committee of the striking workers, negotiated with the government—the Central Committee of the capitalists—concerning the traffic of food-supply trains. What else was this but the exercise of the functions of a dual government? The capitalists understood the situation very clearly and offered extreme resistance to the sharing of power. Baldwin said at the very beginning:

"What was the position in which the Government found itself challenged with an alternative government."

And Churchill immediately protested against the confirmation of an agreement for the joint direction of food-supply trains by the government and General Council:

"What Government in the world could enter into partnership with a rival government, against which it is endeavoring to defend itself and society, and allow that rival government to sit in judgment on every train that runs and on every lorry on the road?"

Did not the Committee of Action, the local committees in charge of the strike, exercise the functions of governmental authorities when in many places they forced the capitalist government representatives to their knees? The strike organ of the Newcastle Trades Council, "Workers' Chronicle," reports for instance that Sir Kingsley Wood, the Chief Commissioner of Newcastle, found himself forced to arrange a conference with the strike committee and to admit that he was no longer in control of the situation, pro-

posing that the strike-breaking organization, O. M. S., withdraw and that a system of dual control be instituted by government and trade unions for the transit of food supply trains.

Did not the General Council exercise the functions of a government when it denied permission to a Dutch fishing firm which asked to be allowed to ship a consignment of fish to England?

Did not government stand against government when for several days only two newspapers appeared in the whole country: "The British Gazette," "published by His Majesty's Stationery Office," and "The British Worker," "published by the General Council of the Trades Union Congress?" The general strike lasted nine days and during these nine days many germs of the division of power, of a dual government in Britain, had developed. Of course such a condition could not long prevail. Two governments cannot exist contiguously for any length of time in any country. The General Council had the beginnings of power but did not want it, it cast aside power even as did Julius Caesar who "thrice refused the kingly crown," only to be cut down by his foes.

The result had to be: prior to the general strike the capitalists' government stood unchallenged, during the general strike to a certain extent there was a dual government, and after the general strike again the unchallenged capitalist government.

Every major economic struggle must transform itself into a political conflict. The British general strike confirmed this fundamental Marxist teaching. What Marx wrote in 1847 in "The Poverty of Philosophy," about the first wage struggles and the first "associations" of the European proletariat, reads as if it had been written about the wage struggles and preservation of the trade unions in May, 1926:

"It is under the form of these combinations that the

first attempts at association among themselves have always been made by the workers.

"The great industry masses together in a single place a crowd of people unknown to each other. Competition divides their interests. But the maintenance of their wages, this common interest which they have against their employer, unites them in the same idea of resistance—combination. Thus combination has always a double end, that of eliminating competition among themselves while enabling them to make a general competition against the capitalists. If the first object of resistance has been merely to maintain wages, in proportion as the capitalists in their turn have combined with the idea of repression, the combinations, at first isolated, have formed in groups, and, in face of a constantly united capital, THE MAINTENANCE OF THE ASSOCIATION BECAME MORE IMPORTANT AND NECESSARY FOR THEM THAN THE MAINTENANCE OF WAGES. This is so true that the English economists are all astonished at seeing the workers sacrifice a good part of their wages on behalf of the associations which, in the eyes of these economists, were only established in support of wages. IN THIS STRUGGLE—A VERITABLE CIVIL WAR—ARE UNITED AND DEVELOPED ALL THE ELEMENTS NECESSARY FOR A FUTURE BATTLE. ONCE ARRIVED AT THAT POINT, ASSOCIATION TAKES A POLITICAL CHARACTER.

"The economic conditions have in the first place transformed the mass of the people of a country into wage workers. The domination of capital has created for this mass of people a common situation with common interests. Thus this mass is already a class, as opposed to capital, but not yet for itself. In the struggle, of which we have only noted some phases, this mass unites, it is constituted as a class for itself. The interests which it defends are the interests of its class. BUT THE STRUGGLE BETWEEN CLASS AND CLASS IS A POLITICAL STRUGGLE." (pp.188-189, Kerr Edition, Chicago, 1920; all emphasis ours.)

The general strike in England was a struggle of class against class and therefore a political struggle.

The political character of the general strike is not a source of weakness, but on the contrary, as Lenin puts it, a source of strength. Here economics turns into politics, the general strike is a continuation of the economic struggle but with other, with political means. Inasmuch as the general strike brings about the rallying of the entire capitalist state power it must go down to defeat if it attempts to stay within economic confines, in other words, within

the boundaries of capitalist society, within the limits of the exploitive relationships between capitalists and workers. Since the general strike means the rallying of the entire capitalist state power it can be victorious only if it draws its final consequences, if it counters the capitalists' state power with the proletarian class might. Without an armed uprising the general strike cannot liberate the proletariat from the yoke of capitalist exploitation.

THE GENERAL COUNCIL—GENERAL STAFF OF THE DEFEAT.

THE General Council, inside of which the Right leaders enjoyed uncontested domination, from beginning to end, consciously led the great movement to its defeat. Immediately prior to the beginning of the struggle the "Daily Herald," official organ of the British labor movement, issued the slogan: "Trust your leaders!" and the workers still continued to have confidence in the "tested" leaders like Thomas, MacDonald, Henderson, Hodges—in all these heroes of dozens of betrayals of the labor movement. Every British worker knows Thomas as the black "hero" of Black Friday of 1921. Yet nevertheless it was still possible that Thomas could stand at the head of the movement. Every British worker also knows MacDonald, the premier of that Labor Government of 1924 which served only the interests of the capitalist class during the nine months of its existence, yet perhaps in this struggle MacDonald could remain the spokesman of the fighting masses. The capitalists likewise had confidence in these "labor leaders." They well knew their own agents in the ranks of the labor movement.

The Conservative "Morning Post" of April 23rd, raised the question of the attitude of Thomas and the other Right leaders:

"Will they wait and see how the cat jumps, or will they have the courage to stand up and fight these enemies of trade unionism."

By "enemies of trade unionism" the "Morning Post" naturally means the Left leaders such as Cook and the Communists.

And the Right leaders answered without hesitancy to

the capitalists' call for help. MacDonald declared in the "Forward": "This is no time for a fight." But the greatest service in defeatist propaganda for the purpose of disorganizing the ranks of the workers was performed by Hodges, Secretary of the Miners' International. Already on April 9th, he declared at a meeting of the Nottingham City Business Club:

"If there were no other alternative, and if it were put up to him AS TO WHETHER HE WOULD ACCEPT A REDUCTION IN WAGES OR A TEMPORARY READJUSTMENT OF THE DAY, HE WOULD ACCEPT THE LATTER." (Manchester Guardian, April 10, 1926.)

In another speech we find Hodges stating:

"NEITHER A STRIKE NOR A LOCKOUT COULD CHANGE THE INEXORABLE ECONOMIC FACTS OF THE SITUATION." ("Daily Telegraph," April 26, 1926.)

He propagated the idea of an international agreement among mine owners. And Brailsford even proposed the League of Nations as an international organization of the coal industry for the solution of the conflict. Any "solution" would suit these "labor leaders" except the solution through struggle.

The General Council did not take over the leadership of the fight, it was shoved into it. Like the "Doctor in Spite of Himself," of Moliere's comedy, the General Council played the role of a "leader in spite of itself."

The workers wanted a united, centralized, powerful leadership. This was essence of the decision of the Trade Union Congress of Scarborough which really wanted to prepare the working class for the coming struggle. That is why it decided to empower the General Council to tax all affiliated trade unions, to call upon them to strike, and to make agreements with the co-operatives to provide the workers with food supplies in case of strike. The General Council was instructed by the Trade Union Congress to convene a special conference of the trade unions to confirm this decision. The General Council however, did not

desire these full powers and in its circular of April 19, 1926, declined the extension of its authority as follows:

"It is considered that any efforts in the way of active support to a union in dispute would be more likely to be successful in coming spontaneously from the union or unions whose assistance is required. . . . Events at some future time might render it necessary. . . . to apply. . . . for additional powers. . . . The Council is of the opinion that the powers already invested in them with regard to intervention in industrial disputes are as effective as can be reasonably exercised at the present time."

More power to the General Council, we must prepare for big struggles—this was the expressed desire of the workers. No extension of the authority of the General Council, evasion of the struggle at any price—this was the reply of the General Council. It did not want to defend the miners against the wage cuts. Even on April 30, on the eve of the decisive struggle, the General Council was recommending to the executive of the Miners' Federation the acceptance of the Government proposal. The leading members of the General Council were opposed to the general strike "in principle." At the outbreak of the struggle the spokesmen of the capitalists took their best arguments from the articles, speeches and books of the Right leaders of the General Council. In parliament Joynton Hicks cited MacDonald's book, written in 1912, in which he opposes the general strike because it is "dominated by revolution and hits poor people heaviest."

The general strike was to begin at midnight of May 30 and on the evening of the same day MacDonald declared in Parliament that he was even, to this day, against the general strike in principle.

Before the struggle and during its course these leaders of the general strike were intriguing against the general strike. When the strike was already a week old Thomas said in a speech in Hammersmith: "I have never approved of the general strike in principle." Never have unprincipled traitors mouthed the word "principle" as much as have

these saboteurs of the great struggle. They constantly repeat that they are "in principle" against the general strike because in principle and practice they are against every struggle. They did everything possible to prevent the outbreak of the conflict and the capitalists gratefully acknowledge their efforts. On May 3, Churchill declared in Parliament that he

" . . . gladly acknowledges the efforts of the Trade Union Committee, and Mr. MacDonald and Mr. J. H. Thomas, to ward off this threatening shocking disaster to our national life. . . . We know how hard the leaders opposite have tried to get the miners to make some concession. . . ."

And on the same day Baldwin said regretfully that

" . . . he had tried to co-operate with Mr. Pugh and his colleagues in searching for an agreement, but he became convinced last night that Mr. Pugh and those with him, who sought peace, WERE NOT IN CONTROL."

But the greatest crime of the General Council was that in all of its announcements and in all the speeches of its members is set up the claim that the general strike was nothing but an industrial strike. Like parrots they repeated their protestations that "the strike has nothing to do with politics," and that only industrial action was involved here. The General Council even maintained that only the wages of the miners were involved long after far deeper problems had arisen. The tragi-comic attempt of the General Council was simply to try to conceal the very existence of the General Strike.

Four million workers on strike—and Pugh, the chairman of the General Council, with the attitude of a babe in arms still wrote to Baldwin:

"I am directed to remind you that THERE IS NOTHING UNUSUAL for workmen to cease work in defense of their interests as wage-earners." (Daily Herald, May 4, 1926.)

Four million workers on strike but the General Council finds nothing unusual in this world-historic event. Not a single political slogan was issued by the General Council during this nine-day strike. Yes, there was too: in the

first issue of the "British Worker," the central strike organ of the General Council, it called upon the workers to occupy their time with sport. It is no wonder that there were workers to be found who applied this "political instruction" by arranging a football match in Plymouth between strikers and the policemen sent against them. This peculiar and characteristic affair is described in No. 5 of the "British Worker" as follows:

"The keen desire of the strikers to KEEP ON GOOD TERMS with the authorities is exemplified by a NOVEL EVENT in Plymouth, where in the presence of several thousand people, A STRIKERS' TEAM DEFEATED A POLICE TEAM AT FOOTBALL by two goals to one. The wife of the Chief Constable kicked off."

The football match between the police and the strikers is, to be sure, only a caricature of the tactics of the General Council, but, like every good caricature, it contains obvious elements of truth. The support of the miners was and remained—except for the sport slogan—the only watchword for the General Council. But how did the General Council fight for this slogan? Did it really defend the interests of the miners? During the entire period of the struggle there were deep differences between the General Council and the miners. Already on May 7 the General Council declared its readiness at any moment to take up the negotiations upon the following basis:

Recall of the lockout.
Recall of the General Strike.
Beginning of new negotiations in the miners' conflict to bring about an honorable agreement.

This declaration contains not a single word against the wage cuts or against the lengthening of the work day. Cook and Smith and the entire miners' executive immediately protested against this avowed step toward treason. We shall see, further on, the dirty, discreditable thing which the General Council understood by the words "honorable agreement."

The General Council piled sin upon sin, betrayal upon betrayal. It betrayed the great international united action

of proletarian solidarity when it declared itself unwilling to accept any kind of material support from abroad in order to evade the charge that the general strike was a revolutionary one. What was the meaning of this declaration of the General Council? The General Council estranged itself from the support campaign of international labor and declared its solidarity with its own national bourgeoisie. The government had long been unscrupulously applying all avowed counter-revolutionary measures of dictatorship, but from beginning to end the General Council remained a captive of parliamentary legality at any price. The government requisitioned newsprint paper, confiscated trade union funds, threw hundreds upon hundreds into prison, marshalled all the armed forces of state power—but the General Council assured the government of its loyalty. In its efforts to be "fair" the General Council left the labor movement without a press. It published its strike paper only after the government had established its central strikebreaking organ. Never before has a leadership of so mighty a struggle shown such an inborn, dyed-in-the-wool legalistic cretinism.

The mighty movement of the British workers truly deserved better leaders. The workers fought heroically but from beginning to end the leaders played the part of capitalist lackeys. They admitted it themselves. In his big speech at the Conference of Trade Union Executives, in giving an account of the negotiations, Thomas said:

"When the verbatim reports are made, my usual critics will say: 'THOMAS WAS ALMOST GROVELLING,' and it is true. Never in my long experience—and I have conducted many negotiations—have I ever BEGGED and PLEADED as I pleaded all day today."

Thomas and his fellow leaders in the General Council were really grovelling before the bosses and the government from the first days, and they continued in this position to the last day of the movement.

Henderson complains like an old woman in Parliament

on May against the attacks of the government's organ, "The British Gazette," and demands: "Reason and not force should decide this struggle." He says "reason" but he means treason. And whatever these leaders were saying they always had in mind only betrayal.

Thomas was the hero of "Black Friday," 1921, he now became the treacherous hero of "Black Wednesday." Are there any more days in the week on which Thomas, Henderson, MacDonald and Hodges do not practice the betrayal of the workers' cause?

The "Daily Telegraph" of May 3 called the General Council a "usurping body" and the contemptible heroes of the General Strike, from the beginning to end, really felt themselves usurpers. They constantly felt like "respectable citizens" ostracized from "respectable society" and come into bad company. The "Daily Telegraph" reminded MacDonald and Thomas that they really had no business in the General Council:

"The General Council in fact starts as a Soviet to run the country in opposition to the government and Parliament. . . . Mr. MacDonald and Mr. Thomas in particular, have either to join the new Soviet of the General Council or be dragged at its tail, and either position ill befits ex-Ministers of the Crown."

And from the first day to the last Thomas and MacDonald left the justice of this reproach. Not for a minute did they feel themselves the leaders of the workers but during the whole struggle they considered themselves only as ex-ministers (and as future ministers) of His Majesty.

Already in 1921, after the great coal conflict of that year, Thomas declared in court:

"I have done nothing, either before the miners' strike, nor during the strike, nor anything in any conflict between capital and labor, at any time, that would conflict with MY OATH AS PRIVY COUNCILLOR."

Thus Thomas testified in 1921 and he could give the same testimony in May, 1925. At this time also neither

Thomas nor His Majesty's other Privy Councillors undertook anything against the interests of king and country and capitalist society.

The Right leaders are to blame for the fact that the general strike ended in defeat. The others, the "Lefts" who vacillated, share the blame because through their vacillation and hesitancy they made the betrayal possible. Thomas, Henderson and MacDonald, however, consciously collaborated towards the defeat. These Lilliputian traitors first shackled the giant general strike and then delivered him to his foes. During the general strike there was quoted in the British Parliament a few lines from Shakespeare's "Measure for Measure":

*Oh it is excellent to have a Giant's strength:
But it is tyrannous to use it like a Giant.*

This giant, the general strike, actually had a giant's strength. But he could not develop it because the leaders held back the good-natured giant from applying his all-crushing strength with their shrieks of "don't ^{be} tyrannical."

THE INTERNATIONAL BOURGEOISIE AND THE INTERNATIONAL PROLETARIAT.

THE General Strike signified a severe disorganization not only of British industry but of the whole world economy. With the calling of the general strike the pound sterling began to fall and the French franc kept it company. In two days the franc fell by 10 points. An actual coal panic gripped a number of countries. In Italy the Fascist press made every effort to quiet the population. The shortage of British coal made itself felt simultaneously in such far distant places as Oslo and Buenos Aires. In the Argentine stock exchange there was a panic, in Norway the government issued an embargo on coal exports in response to the British general strike. The American ruling class viewed with grave concern the elimination of its most important foreign trade market; the Department of Commerce immediately declared that the general strike would severely injure the foreign trade of the United States of America, for America exports to England weekly 21 million dollars worth of commodities, not less than 21% of the total American export. The prices of certain goods, particularly those of grain on the Chicago market, began to drop. In the harbor of Rotterdam the goods piled up, the warehouses were filled to bursting and coal prices climbed by five shillings per ton within a few days.

The general strike lasted only nine days but this was long enough to show its lion's claws to the entire world economy. The capitalists of the most important industrial countries at first viewed this struggle with "mixed feelings." The strike-breaking sheet of the British bourgeoisie, "The British Gazette," in its second issue of May 6, wrote:

"The German public, generally, was glad at first to hear the stupendous news from England. They felt some Schaden-

freude for they had been through all this and little or no sympathy shown to them. Their first thought undoubtedly was that the huge strike in England might benefit them in some way and might help them to regain some of the foreign trade they had lost. They hoped that the struggle will open English eyes, as they put it, to the fact that they are not alone in the world and that no progress will be made unless the industrial countries work hand in hand."

The feeling of "Schadenfreude" on the part of competitors was very quickly displaced however by that of capitalist solidarity. And the more the strike proceeded, the more the world bourgeoisie looked upon the great struggle as its own affair. The Spanish government took measures to facilitate coal export to Britain. The American financial sheet, "Journal of Commerce," declared in alarm:

"If the strike is won, England is heading toward a proletarian dictatorship."

The semi-official organ of the American government the "Washington Post," on May 9 wrote editorially:

"WE ARE WITH YOU, ENGLAND!"

The editorial states:

"If the British strike should develop into a war of violence, the United States will have a duty to perform. THERE WILL BE NO NEUTRALITY IN SUCH A WAR. The United States government should range itself alongside the British government and should lend every possible assistance to it. . . . Whatever England needs should be furnished quickly. The attack on popular government in England is an attack on popular government in the United States. Americans would be dull and deluded if they did not perceive that the triumph of Communism in England would involve the United States in war."

The American government promised harassed Britain all possible help and even declared its readiness for military intervention on the part of the United States in the event of civil war in England. Despite a competitor's "Schadenfreude" the ruling class comprehended that the attack against capitalist government in England is an attack against every capitalist government in the world. And we may add that the international proletariat—despite all vacillations, half-way measures and even open betrayals of certain leaders—likewise recognized that the struggle of

the British workers was the struggle of the workers of the whole world.

A warm wave of solidarity went through the proletariat of all countries. Since the first periods of the Russian revolution the international labor movement has not experienced such a spontaneous mighty surge of working class solidarity. The workers realize that the attack against the standard of living of the British miners is simultaneously an assault against the proletarian standard of living in all industrial countries. The reformist leaders attempted everywhere to dampen this enthusiasm, tried everywhere to sabotage the activity for support. No methods were too low for them. Sometimes they tried the tactic of the conspiracy of deadly silence. The May Day edition of the German miners' organ, "Bergarbeiterzeitung," contained not a single word about the great coal conflict in England. The German Social Democratic "Vorwaerts" as well as the Belgian "Le Peuple," even tried for a time to conceal the very fact of the general strike by reporting only about the "stoppage of work by several branches of industry." The reformist leader of the German Miners' Union, Husemann, began to discuss the best possible utilization of the British coal crisis for the increase of German coal export. The P. P. S. (Polish Socialist Party) organ in the coal district of Dombrowa, "Arbeiterzeitung," on April 21, wrote:

"The coal conflict in England enlarges the opportunities for the export of German and Polish coal and makes possible the improvement of the standard of living of the German and Polish miners."

The leaders of the German Social Democracy and of the Polish Socialists looked upon the life or death struggle of their English brothers merely as a chance to boost the export interests of their own employers in order thereby to secure for themselves perhaps a few miserable crumbs. Most of the trade union leadership decided upon mere sham measures. The Brussels Conference of the Miners' International concluded with the adoption of a resolution of

platonic support. The Joint Conference of the Miners' International and the Transport Workers' International in Ostend did not lead to real executive measures despite the efforts of the revolutionary elements. The Joint Conference of the Second International and the Amsterdam Trade Union International on May 11 aroused itself to the heroic heights of adopting a resolution which states that the British struggle should be supported since it is "a purely economic and trade union activity." This joint session of the executives of the two reformist internationals on May 11, the eighth day of the general strike and one day before the termination of the general struggle, further decided that connections with England for the purpose of studying the events must be improved. Help was needed—they gave studies! They also declared that the time was not propitious to debate with the Communists on a united front action. The President of the American Federation of Labor, Green, declared with cynical frankness: the British general strike is a challenge to the government—the American trade unions cannot therefore support the general strike. Furthermore, the American unions will fulfill their contract so there can be no talk of a sympathetic strike. The President of the United Mine Workers, Lewis, who not long ago led 150,000 anthracite coal miners to a miserable defeat, pompously assured the American government that the American miners would remain loyal and would under no circumstances enter upon a solidarity strike.

Notwithstanding the reformists' betrayal and despite sham measures of the trade union authorities and the false reports in their press there was a rallying everywhere of the international working class for the finest deeds of solidarity.

In Belgium, Holland and Germany the bunkering of British ships was made possible. Coal transport to England from these three countries was prevented. In the harbors of Antwerp, Amsterdam and Ymuiden not only

coal shipments to Britain were stopped but also all other cargoes. In the Scandinavian countries the blockade was complete. In Holland and in Germany it was possible to establish the united front between the "free" and the Christian miners' and transport workers' unions. Hamburg's masses of harbor workers carried out the blockade spontaneously and compelled the transport union authorities to take the requisite steps. The pit-committees of the Ruhr miners passed rules against overtime work to increase production of export coal. In Czechoslovakia a control-service was established at the border stations to keep tab on coal exports. The printers of Paris prevented the publication of the British Conservative "Daily Mail," which for a time was printed there by strike breakers and sent to Britain by airplane. The Russian workers—as always—rose as one man to the aid of the harassed British workers. The trade unions of the Soviet Union called upon the workers for a donation of one-fourth of a day's wage as strike support for their British comrades and were met with enthusiastic agreement on the part of the toiling masses. The harbor workers and seamen of the Soviet Union declared a strike against the loading and manning of British ships. The trade unions immediately prevented all shipment of coal and all other commodities to England.

From the ends of the earth came manifestations of solidarity with the great struggle of the British workers. From South Africa, from India, from Mexico, from the democratic-revolutionary government of Canton, from the Negro longshoremen of New York, and even—despite the commands of Lewis and Green—from the trade unions of the American labor aristocracy. The revolutionary significance of the British general strike was so cast that the British battle-line extended itself around the world, the ruling class of all capitalist countries solidarized with the British bosses—the workers of the whole world proved their solidarity with the English working class.

THE UNCONDITIONAL SURRENDER.

ON May 11 the Astbury Decision declared the general strike illegal. And on May 12 the General Council announced its unconditional surrender.

Was this precipitous breaking off of the strike really necessary? By no means. The great battlefront stood unbroken. Not a breach could be seen anywhere. The Government's radiogram on May 10 stated:

"ANY ADDITION TO THE NUMBER OF WORKERS IDLE TODAY is accounted for by the fact that owing to the rationing of fuel and the shortage of raw material, mills and factories in industrial areas have been forced to restrict their activities."

The strike was spreading—so the government reported, and an official Reuter report of May 10 also speaks of growing devastation due to the strike:

"General strike CONTINUES UNABATED with its INCREASING WASTEFUL CONSEQUENCES TO ALL."

And on May 11 the Reuter report is compelled to announce:

"In London and neighboring areas many large industries have been obliged to close down owing to the want of electrical power."

The fighting spirit of the workers was mounting. On May 8 and 9 big meetings were held throughout the country and in many places the workers demanded that the trades not yet called out on strike be thrown into the struggle. On May 11, Cramp, the President of the Railwaymen's Union, reported that 500,000 railwaymen were striking, and that not a break was to be seen in the ranks. Only the higher officials performed strike-breaking service.

Not only the fighting spirit of the workers but also their bitterness against the bosses was mounting. The clashes were likewise beginning to take on a threatening aspect. On the evening of May 10 Reuter reports:

"DISTURBANCES FEW BUT SHOW SIGNS OF BECOMING SHARPER."

Obviously it was not the crumbling away of the strike that moved the leaders of the General Council to make their unconditional surrender. Other motives swayed them. A part of them were only waiting for the first chance to betray the strike. The MacDonalds and Thomases had attached themselves to the movement only in order the more surely and certainly to be able to betray it. Certain others, however, were cowed by the military preparations of the Government, they were terrorized by the Astbury Decision, which declared them personally liable. The leaders were afraid lest the control of the movement slip more and more from their hands. The workers were already demanding the mobilization of the "second line" of industries not yet engaged in the struggle. The clashes between the workers and the armed forces of the Government became more and more bitter and threatening. It became ever clearer that open conflict between working class and state power was inevitable. The leaders saw the spectre of the proletarian revolution. They hurried, thereupon, to surrender to the capitalists. The views of certain leaders were strikingly illustrated by Toole, a Labor Party candidate to parliament, who said after the surrender that the general strike had to be broken off, because if it had lasted another three weeks there would have been civil war and revolution.

Never was there a more despicable betrayal. Already on May 10 the "Times" began to hint that "influential men of good will had begun informal negotiations." Thomas, MacDonald and Henderson—these were the "Times'" "influential men of good will," who were carrying on secret

conversations with the chairman of the Royal Coal Commission, Sir Herbert Samuel.

How slowly and clumsily did the mobilization of the workers' forces get under way at the beginning of the struggle—and with what lightning speed the leaders now liquidated the fight! On May 11 the General Council met a memorandum from Sir Herbert Samuel was submitted to it. This memorandum already had the support of Thomas, MacDonald and Henderson. This bit of writing was nothing else than the document of betrayal. It spoke of the reorganization of the industry, of the continuation of the subsidy, of wage-boards and reorganizational commissions—but all this was mere bunk. The real content of the document was a wage-cut for the miners. On the night of May 11 there met the joint session of the miners and the General Council. In this conference the latter already confronted the Miners' Executive with the accomplished fact of a betrayal. The General Council already stood upon the basis of the Samuel Memorandum. The Miners' Executive refused to ratify it. On the morning of May 12 a delegation of the General Council once more went to the Miners' Federation Executive for a last minute effort to get them to accept the memorandum. But the Miners' Executive remained solid. Thereupon, without delay, the General Council continued on its traitorous course alone, and the correspondence between the General Council and Samuel was published.

In the face of the whole working class the General Council declared its readiness to accept the proposal of the Chairman of Royal Coal Commission. It immediately notified the Government that it was prepared to surrender. Premier Baldwin sent out word: **UNCONDITIONALLY;** the unconditional withdrawal of the general strike is the precondition of all negotiations, to any dealings with the trade union delegation.

The general strike was called off before a fateful audi-

ence. Arthur Pugh, the Chairman of the General Council, being asked by Baldwin to "be good enough to make a statement," replied:

"We had been exploring other possibilities with full knowledge that whatever happened, and however long the present situation lasted or whatever might be its consequences in the long run, the process of negotiations would have to be gone through. Well, as a result of developments in that direction and the possibilities that we see in getting back to negotiations and your assurance, speaking for the general community of citizens as a whole, that no steps should be left unturned to get back to negotiations, we are here today, sir, to say that this general strike is to be terminated forthwith in order that negotiations may proceed, and we can only hope may proceed in a manner which will bring about a satisfactory settlement." ("Times," May 13, 1926).

Thus Pugh assured the Prime Minister that the strike would be called off "forthwith." But Baldwin wanted more clarity as to this "forthwith," and Mr. Pugh obliged him: "Forthwith. That means immediately."

When it comes to calling off the strike then even the slowing moving General Council can get a move on, then "forthwith" really and truly means "immediately." Three short Reuter telegrams dramatically reflect the situation.

The first, sent at 12.14 p. m. on May 12, read:

"TRADE UNION COUNCIL CONFERRED GOVERNMENT."

The second, sent thirty-six minutes later:

"TRADE UNION COUNCIL ANNOUNCES IN ORDER TO RESUME NEGOTIATIONS STRIKE ENDS TODAY."

The third, sent at 1:25 a. m.:

"GENERAL STRIKE FINISHED."

These three short dispatches announced to the world the termination of one of the most important and dramatic chapters in the history of the international labor movement.

The surrender was accomplished. And what a surrender! It occurred unconditionally, as demanded in

Baldwin's midnight ultimatum on May 2. The General Council humbly carried out every letter of that ultimatum. An immediate unconditional surrender with open betrayal of their allied army corps of the labor movement, the miners, still engaged in desperately dangerous battle. Not even the honor of retaining weapons was granted the vanquished by the haughty victor. The General Council surrendered without the slightest of guarantees or assurances. Even Reuter reported: "The proposals were submitted without consulting the miners' representatives." Samuel, Chairman of the Royal Coal Commission, who played the role of "honest broker" in the nefarious business, in his open letter declared that he was acting in his own name and that he could give neither the promises nor the assurances of the government.

The bosses won. The workers were disarmed by their own leaders. The proletarian army was demobilized by its own General Staff.

PURSUIT FOLLOWING THE LOST BATTLE.

THE ruling class had triumphed. At last it could breathe freely after the big battle. The Conservative "Daily Graphic" expressed the sentiments of the whole capitalist class, when, on May 13, it wrote:

"It is a victory for the principle that in England there can be but one, the elected government."

At the outset of the struggle the pound sterling began to drop. After the victory the "Daily Mail" radio jubilantly reported that in London as well as New York the pound sterling had gone above par for the first time since the world war.

Throughout the whole fight the leaders of the General Council had promised the workers a victory along the line of a "purely economic strike." The workers had faith in them and did not take to political weapons. But the moment that the proletarian army was demobilized, the moment that the general strike was broken off for the very reason that it must inevitably by force of circumstances take a political turn, it became clear that the "purely economic demands" of the struggle could only have been achieved by pushing forward the general strike. The very moment that the workers had been rendered defenseless by the treason of their own leaders, the employers began an assault upon the trade unions all along the line.

Already on May 11 Baldwin had threatened reprisals against the unions:

"The Government will of course continue to safeguard the legitimate rights of the trade unions, but the country has shown that neither now nor hereafter will UNCONSTITUTIONAL interference be tolerated in the political affairs of the nation by any organization in the state."

All along the line the employers declared they would not observe the old collective agreements. They were by no means prepared to negotiate with the trade unions con-

cerning the resumption of work. The workers would be readmitted into the factories only as individuals and after careful selection. They immediately made demands for wage-cuts and longer hours. With brutal frankness they announced that the strikebreakers who had served them loyally in the great crisis, would receive preference. The workers on the railways, docks, trams, and underground railways all found themselves threatened with the reprisals of the bosses. The newspaper distributing agencies immediately launched a campaign for a non-union "open-shop."

At the conclusion of the strike the King's address had stated:

"Let us forget whatever elements of bitterness the events of the past few days may have created."

The general persecution, which the employers immediately continued in their campaign against the workers, showed the capitalists' spirit of generosity and conciliation. And when MacDonald, the leader of the Labor Party and chief of the betrayal, arose in Parliament and, citing the words of the King, pleaded for the magnanimity of the capitalists, Baldwin's reply cut like a whip-lash across his face: that the government's sole obligation was towards the strikebreakers. Baldwin said:

"I am not one of those who ever expected that whenever the end of this great upset would come, it would or could straighten itself out in a day. . . . The supreme necessity of the country requires that the largest body of men possible should be brought back to work at the earliest possible moment. I make that my starting point. I have always urged that the occasion calls neither for malice nor for recrimination nor for triumph. Our duty is to escape as soon as possible from the consequences of this unhappy situation. . . . I HAVE GIVEN NO PLEDGES AT ALL, SAVE ONE, AND THAT IS THAT THOSE WHO HELPED THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD NOT SUFFER FOR HAVING DONE SO. . . . There is a real difficulty in reconciling a pledge of that kind with getting all the men back to work. THAT MUST BE THRESHED OUT BETWEEN THE TRADE UNIONS AND THE EMPLOYERS' ASSOCIATIONS. . . . I have made my position clear and the position of the government clear. We have no power to coerce, to order." (The "Times," May 14, 1926.)

Thus the workers and the employers are to settle this matter between themselves—so said the Prime Minister—the government had no power to give them any orders. The capitalist government thereby announces it has no power to hinder the capitalists in their persecution of the workers and their trade unions. This is said by the self-same government which 24 hours earlier had marshalled the whole state power of capitalist society against the workers, when the progress of the strike menaced the employers.

The capitalists and their government can well afford to be insolent. The proletarian army has been shattered and demoralized by its leaders. The bosses now want to exploit a favorable opportunity not only to smash the general strike but also to depress the workers' standard of living, and to rob the toilers of their fighting organs.

The employers behave as is necessary in war. Clausewitz, the great military theoretician, once wrote the following about pursuit and the utilization of a victory after a successful battle: "In such a time of complete good fortune the victor must not hesitate so to dispose his forces as to drag everything his army can reach into the pie, to cut off deploys, seize unprepared strongholds, occupy big cities, etc. He can permit himself anything until such time as a new situation arises, and the more he permits himself the longer will it be before this happens."

The British employers acted according to the strategic laws of the victor; they tried to smash the various isolated proletarian army corps one after another, to cut off deploys and to capture the unprepared trade-union strongholds. They thought the whole essence of the fight was a change in the balance of forces in the country, the shattering of the fortified positions of the working class, the trade unions. They well knew that they could not hold down the working class forever but intended to venture everything so that the new situation would be postponed as long as possible.

THE SECOND BATTLE—THE SECOND SURRENDER.

THE capitulation of the General Council aroused tremendous anger among the workers. In Poplar, the most radical section of London, the police had to defend the trade union headquarters against the rage of the workers. The Woodworkers Executive adopted a resolution sharply condemning the General Council's abrogation of the general strike and its failure to get any guarantees for the miners, demanding the immediate calling of a national trade union conference. The Woodworkers sent this resolution to all trade unions. Two large railway clerks' locals demanded that the secretary of their organization, Walkden, be forced to resign. Big demonstrations were held in Glasgow in which numerous banners bore the slogan: "Down with Thomas."

The general pursuit following upon the lost battle spurred on the indignation of the workers. They wanted to fight on, and even compelled their leaders to continue the struggle. On May 13 the Executive Committee of the three railway unions called upon the workers to continue the strike until an acceptable agreement could be reached. The Labor Party protested in Parliament against the provocative attitude of the employers. The General Council called upon all unions to see to it that under no circumstances were their members to enter upon individual agreements, and promised the masses: "Your union will protect you and insist that all previous agreements be maintained intact."

The struggle revived. Not only the miners fought on but also the railwaymen, dockers, transport workers, and printers renewed the battle. On May 13 MacDonald could say in Parliament: Today there are more men on strike than yesterday; efforts are being made to destroy the unions, to humble the workers to the dust, but labor will

not tolerate this. And on the same day Thomas announced that the ranks of the strikers were greater by one hundred thousand than the day before.

May 13 was a remarkable day. Twenty-four hours earlier the general strike had been called off, and lo!—now the general strike was on once more. But the fight lasted only a short time. How could it be otherwise? Already on May 12 the backbone of the movement had been broken. The leaders' treason carried confusion into the ranks of the masses. Nevertheless, if the leaders had been determined to continue the battle it might have gone on with excellent prospects. But Thomas, MacDonald and Henderson did not want to fight, even where it involved the very existence of the trade unions, the maintenance of the most elementary rights of the workers' organizations. They promised the workers: "Your union will protect you," but they broke this promise, just as they had broken every pledge they ever made to the workers, in order that they might keep the pledges made as the Privy Councillors of King and capitalists.

The second battle also ended in surrender. One category of workers after another humbly made peace with the employers.

The militancy of the workers was just sufficient to prevent, for the moment, the lengthening of the work-day and slashing of wages. It could just save the bare existence of the trade unions. But that was all. The contract between the railwaymen's unions and the railway associations is typical of the agreements among other categories of workers:

"The trade unions admit that in calling the strike they committed a WRONGFUL ACT against the companies, and agree that the companies do not, by reinstatement of strikers, surrender their legal rights to claim DAMAGES arising out of the strike, from strikers and others responsible.

"Unions undertake that they will not again instruct their members TO STRIKE WITHOUT PREVIOUS NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE COMPANY and to give no support of any kind to their members to take any UNAUTHORIZED action,

and not to encourage supervisory employees in special class to take part in any strike.

"The companies agree that those of their employees who have gone out on strike shall be taken back to work as soon as traffic offers and WORK HAS BEEN FOUND FOR THEM.

"Principle to be followed in reinstating is seniority in each grade at each station, depot or office.

"The companies intimate that arising out of the strike it may be necessary TO REMOVE CERTAIN PERSONS TO OTHER POSITIONS but no such persons' salaries or wages are to be reduced.

"Each company will notify unions within one week of the names of the men whom they propose to transfer and will afford each man the opportunity of having an advocate present his case to the general manager.

"The settlement will not extend to persons who have been guilty of violence or intimidation."

The dockers, tram employees, and underground railway workers entered into similar agreements. The printers also, with the additional promise never to interfere in the future with the contents of the papers.

In this second surrender the trade unions everywhere recognized that the general strike was "illegal" and that they could be held liable for its damages; they promise that they will never again undertake a solidarity strike, and they ratify the victimization, since the capitalists alone determine whether enough work is at hand. The employers retain the right to transfer workers as they please to other work places and shifts. The capitalists also specify their right to blacklist any workers whom they believe chargeable with violence and intimidation. In this way all courageous and militant elements can be thrown upon the street.

The workers submitted to these terms. But a deep ferment prevails among the masses. Hardly a few days had passed when the workers already began to realize that this second surrender was but the logical consequence of the first, and that both were but the direct result of the treason of their leaders. For the time being the great battle is over. But other great struggles—for the future of the British labor movement, for the future leadership of the coming struggles, are only beginning.

THE GLORY OF THE MINERS.

IN this great fight a special chapter is due to the British miners. They were the first to go into battle, and they remained on the field long after the other army corps of the proletariat had withdrawn from the fray.

The Executive of the Miners' Federation had no part in the betrayal by the General Council. On the day of the surrender the Miners' Executive addressed a letter to the General Council in which it made clear that it had taken part in the negotiations over the Samuel Memorandum, and that it is not involved in the compositions of these proposals. It immediately declared itself against the memorandum's proposals for wage reductions, and called upon the miners not to quit the struggle. With justified bitterness Cook, the leader of the miners, pointed out the "anomaly," that in other countries transport workers refused to ship coal to England, while the railwaymen in England itself resumed coal traffic. The General Council had demonstratively declined the offers of material support from the international working class, and particularly from the trade unions of the Soviet Republic. The minute the hands of the miners' executive were no longer tied by the General Council, Cook, however, sent a message to the Miners' Union Congress of the Soviet Union, expressing warmest appreciation for their evidence of magnificent solidarity and extensive material aid in support of the British miners in their bitter struggle against wage cuts.

In this fight the British miners covered themselves with glory. They are an example to the entire British and world proletariat of how a powerful labor organization can fight once it has freed itself from the traitorous Right leaders, once it is headed by honest revolutionary workers. In 1921 the miners surrendered because at that time they were still led by Hodges. In 1926 the miners fought heroically because they had leaders like Cook and the adherents of the Minority Movement.

TACTICS OF THE COMMUNISTS.

THE small youthful Communist Party of Great Britain gave a splendid account of itself in this struggle. It had estimated the situation correctly and knew how to conduct a correct policy. Its starting point was the recognition that the present situation is not as yet the revolutionary one which convulses the ruling class with terror, but it is one link in a longer crisis period which accompanies the decline of British capitalism.

With unshakable patience the Communists anchored themselves in the trade unions—the militancy of the miners is due not least to the Communist miners. The Party stuck tenaciously to the united front tactic despite of all expulsions from the Labor Party, and all provocative assaults from the reformist labor leaders. It had the courage to call the attention of the workers, from the very first, to the questions of the workers' self-defense, and the winning over of the soldiery, despite the jailing of its leaders and the imprisonment of hundreds of its members.

At this time it is possible to summarize only the most important phases of the Party's fight. The Report of the Royal Coal Commission furnished the basis of the Party's campaign. The Communist Party countered the report of the commission with three fundamental demands:

- No lengthening of hours, a raise in wages and a national agreement.
- Nationalization of the mines without compensation.
- Appeal to the General Council to mobilize all the forces of labor against the capitalist offensive.

The Communist Party was the heart and soul of the Minority Conference of March 21st which had the historic

role of making the British workers conscious of their tremendous and responsible position.

For months the Communist Party proclaimed the inevitability of the struggle. Ever since "Red Friday," since the victory of the summer of 1925, it had been enlightening the workers as to the temporary character of this victory; the more strongly therefore could the Party, on the eve of the great fight (April 23), demand from the General Council that a National Conference of all Trade Unions be called without delay, and that it take steps to effect, on the international field, the unity of the two trade union internationals. The slogan calling for the immediate organizing of Strike Commissariats for Food Supplies, and Com-mitees of Action to lead the strike were also thrown by the Party into the masses.

When then on April 29 the National Conference of all Trade Union Executives actually came into being the Party addressed it an open letter. It reminded them of "Black Friday," the result of collaboration with the capitalists, and of "Red Friday," the result of proletarian solidarity. "In the name of the working class" the Central Committee of the Communist Party called upon the National Conference to bring the whole force of organized labor to the aid of the miners. Clearly and practically the Communists showed the necessity for an international workers' conference, in order to establish an international blockade against British capitalism. In its "Message to the Workers" the Party again pointed out how the Communists had predicted the inevitability of the struggle and proved that the Right leaders had "deliberately neglected" to make any preparation. The Party called upon the General Council to use the power it had been given by the unions for an immediate embargo of all transport of coal or scabs and for the stoppage of the lying capitalist press. Trades Councils must be vested with full authority as Councils of Action and all workers should rally around them. They must press

for the creation of Workers' Defense Corps and commissariat departments.

On May 5 the Party went one step further. It tried to intensify the slogans of the struggle. At this time three important slogans were put forward by the Party in its "Manifesto":

1. "The first slogan of the general strike—'Not a farthing from wages, not a second on hours'—must now give way to a new slogan: 'Only nationalization of the mines, without compensation, can smash the economic power of the mine-owners and guarantee the workers from a repetition of the attack by the capitalists.'
2. "Demand the resignation of the Conservative government which openly supports the mineowners and brings insuaiting charges against the working class.
3. "Demand the formation of a workers' government."

The Party saw clearly that the general strike could not win if it remained on the defensive. It said to the workers:

"The limitation of the strike to purely defensive measures is fraught with danger. In order to conquer it is necessary to go forward to attack and to strike a crushing blow at the capitalists."

The next day the Party put forth an additional demand:

"Payment of wages for the period of the strike which has been caused by the employers and the government." ("Workers' Bulletin," May 6).

The enlightenment of the workers as to the significance of the army as a capitalist weapon and the enlightenment of the soldiers on their true proletarian interests has from the very beginning played an important role in the Party's agitation. Already prior to the strike the members of the Central Committee had been imprisoned on this very charge: that they had called upon the soldiers to refuse to shoot down the striking workers. The first issue of the Party's new daily paper (which had been launched for this fight but which, on account of the general suspension of the press, remained the only issue) laid par-

ticular stress upon the organizing of the Workers' Defense Corps, and the significance of fraternization between soldiers and workers. The paper advised the workers that when they were conscripted as military reserves they should tell the soldiers "the truth." The "Daily Mail" gave the following excellent testimonial in its picture of the revolutionary anti-militarist work conducted by the British Communists:

"Revolutionary propaganda has recently increased to a marked extent in the Army and Navy as well as in the industrial centers. Many leaflets have found their way into barracks calling upon the soldiers to refuse obedience to their superiors when the country shall be in a crisis. The government is going deeply into this matter." (Retranslated).

As the first sign of the General Council's open treachery became plain the Communist Party spread the alarm among the workers. After the struggle had been called off the Party expressed the sentiment of the broad masses of toilers in branding the Right leaders with their betrayal and maintaining that the weakness of the "Left" in the General Council shared the blame. It called upon the workers to take the conduct of the struggle into their own hands, to carry on the strike, to reject the Samuel Memorandum, and to preserve their solidarity with the miners.

"Stand behind the miners!" is the chief slogan of the Party's manifesto of May 13, which depicts the application of the whole vast state apparatus against the workers on strike, exposes the collaboration of the Right leaders and the government, and also criticizes the Left:

"Even now it lacks the courage to come out openly as a minority on the General Council and unite with the forces of the actual majority of the workers against the united front of Baldwin-Samuel-Thomas."

The manifesto concludes with the slogans:

Refuse to return to work.
Reject the Samuel Memorandum.
Demand the calling of an extraordinary conference of the
Strike Committees and Councils of Action.

On the whole the Communist Party followed a correct tactic. It proclaimed the inevitability of the struggle long before the outbreak of the general strike; it stressed the necessity for the fight. It was the first to issue the slogan of the general strike. Prior to and during the general strike it constantly demanded the solidarity of the working masses of all industries, and also the coalition of the forces of the workers in the factories with those who were unemployed. From the very beginning it demanded the international extension of the battle-line. Its principal endeavor was to instill in this great political strike a political consciousness also. It tried to raise the question of private property in connection with the demand for the nationalization of the mines. It tried to organize the forces of the working class into fighting units, by calling for the formation of Workers' Defense Corps. At the proper time it directed the attention of the workers to the fact that the strike had burst its economic bonds, and they had all the forces of the government against them, that they could win only by going over to the offensive, that the fraternization with the soldiers was a basic condition of victory. It raised the question of power when it called for the formation of a Workers' Government.

Before the betrayal the Party criticized the two-faced role of the Right leaders: it predicted their treachery. After the betrayal it showed them up as capitalist agents in the working class, and charged the "Left" also with sharing the blame for the betrayal. But throughout the whole fight it was always conscious that while the fight is on it is impermissible to disrupt the unified battle-front and to lose connection with the broad masses. After the general strike was ended the Party called for the continuation of the struggle and for self-sacrificing solidarity with the miners.

This correct tactical line could not prevent betrayal and defeat. It will, however, bear abundant fruits

in the future. Certain signs already indicate that the Party has won the confidence of broad masses of workers, that already it is the spokesman of the embittered masses who rebel against the betrayal. In its entire attitude during the struggle—which was worthy of the great historical events—the Communist Party of Great Britain proved the correctness of Joynson Hicks when, prior to the outbreak of the general strike, he stated that:

"It was necessary to realize that they had to settle down to trench warfare against the Communists for the rest of their lives." ("Morning Post," April 28).

In this the Communist baiter of the Baldwin government told the gathering of London Conservatives the truth. The Communist Party of Great Britain is here, solidier than ever, more closely connected with the masses than ever before, and if the victory of the proletarian revolution does not come sooner, the Conservative gentlemen will truly have to wage trench warfare against the Communists until the end of their days.

THE LESSONS OF THE GREAT CONFLICT.

THE nine days of the general strike that shook up capitalist England will loom larger in the future development of the British working class than nine years of slow, peaceful evolution. The study of the general strike will of course constitute a veritable high-school of revolutionary strategy and tactics for the entire international labor movement. But for the British working class the general strike is a turning point which is decisive for the whole future. The time is not yet ripe to draw the distant perspectives of the British general strike—we are still in the midst of the great events, the army of a million miners still stands in heroic struggle, hundreds of thousands of railwaymen have not yet gone back to work. One thing, however—and this is fundamental—can be determined already today: The political and social consequences of the British general strike of 1926 will not resemble those of the Chartist general strike of 1842, but far rather those of the Russian general strike of 1905. After the defeat of Chartism there followed decades during which the English labor movement sank in the bogs of opportunism. The defeat of the Russian Revolution of 1905, however, created the conditions for new victories. Already today one may say with certainty: the revolutionary period of the British labor movement will have its beginning in the general strike of 1926. The Chartist general strike was the final curtain of the great tragedy of the first revolutionary movement of the British working class; the general strike of 1926, however, will just as surely be the dress rehearsal of the higher form of revolutionary struggle as was the Russian Revolu-

lution of 1905. The comparative study of the Russian general strike of 1905 with the British general strike of 1926 will be one of the most important immediate tasks for Marxist-Leninist research; but even today certain differences are to be distinguished.

The incomparably greater masses of participants in the British strike by this very quantity change also the quality of the struggle in certain respects: the Russian strike had a generally spontaneous character whereas the British struggle bears all the marks of thorough organization; the Russian general strike had tremendous political effect but no essential economic consequences, it paralyzed the political life of the nation while the British strike paralyzed the economic life of the country; the Russian strike released lasting international political effects, but economically it caused no stir outside of Russia, the British strike, however, within a few days only brought with it serious disruption in world economy; in the Russian general strike the leading role was in the hands of the political party, in the British strike it remained predominantly in the grip of the trade unions.

In England the period of purely economic strikes is over with this general strike. The decline of the British Empire has reached a stage at which every sizeable wage struggle of the working class must inevitably turn into a political conflict. From now on the question of power will never vanish from the agenda of the British workers.

The defeat of the general strike will teach the English workers how to organize for victory.

In order to determine the basic lessons which the general strike will bequeath to the workers of Britain, we must study the most important experiences of the English working class which brought them to apply the weapon of the general strike. Every working class learns primarily from its own experiences, but thus far the British workers have learned only from their own findings. Neither

theoretical enlightenment nor the experience of the international labor movement have played any decisive role in the development of the British labor movement.

In the last years the British workers have gone through three great experiences, three important lessons:

The first was that of "Black Friday" in 1921. The isolated miners, deserted by the railwaymen and transport workers, were defeated. The lesson of this event was: Isolated struggle of one branch of industry must lead only to defeat.

The second great experience of the British workers was the Labor Party government of 1924. As a result of the nine months of the MacDonald regime the whole British working class was impregnated by another fundamental lesson: the pure and simple parliamentary methods can attain no manifest returns to the workers.

The third experience was that of "Red Friday" in the summer of 1925. Thanks to the common action of the Railwaymen, Transport Workers and Miners, the attack against the latter was beaten off with the threat of a general strike.

From these three great experiences the working class drew the conclusion that a joint action of all workers was necessary, and this in the form of an extra-parliamentary, direct mass struggle: in other words, the application of the general strike as the immediate weapon of the workers.

The fact of the general strike itself will also be a new experience which will determine the further trend of thought, the strategic and tactical arsenal of the British working class.

The first fundamental lesson that the British workers will draw from the general strike will be the shattering of the democratic pacifist illusions which for decades have been deep rooted in the working class. Nowhere in all Europe had the working class such unshakable faith in the impartiality of the government, in the sanctity of democracy, and in parliament. But now the workers have seen with their own eyes how the constitutional cabinet

transforms itself into Civil Commissars armed with dictatorial powers. **Legality**, the great fetish of the British working class, now means the illegality of the trade unions, the seizure of strike funds, the liability of every last trade union member. For decades the British government could preserve the appearance of standing above parties and classes; but in the great general strike it had to show its true colors, it had to acknowledge itself publicly as the strike committee of the capitalist class. For decades the English workers talked about "our" army, "our" navy. Now they have found out for themselves that "their" army and "their" navy are but the armed power of the bourgeoisie. The King's person was likewise "holy" in the eyes of the workers. The Royal proclamation of the state of emergency will now make the British workers receptive to the slogan of the republic.

The second great lesson of the general strike will be the criticism of the general strike itself as a weapon. The workers will realize that the general strike, as a defensive, "purely economic" weapon, is inadequate. They will now draw the lesson that the general strike is an irresistible weapon in the hands of the working class only if it does not confine itself against the capitalist government. The significance of the general strike as a political weapon, the connections between economics and politics, an understanding of the question of power, the problems of the armed uprising will be the second fundamental lesson of the mass strike.

Distrust of the traitorous or semi-traitorous leaders—that will be the third lesson of the British general strike. On the eve of the great struggle the "Daily Herald" could successfully issue the slogan: "Trust your leaders!" Now the slogan will be: "Down with the treacherous leaders who have abused our trust."

The general strike was terminated in the general betrayal on the part of the Right leaders: the general betrayal however, will soon be followed by a general reckoning between these traitorous leaders and the workers. Not

only a reckoning with the "Right," but also with the "Left" leaders. The silence of the Left leaders concerning the deeds of the Right effectively supplemented the "negotiations" of the latter with the government and the employers. From the beginning to end the Right stood firm: it wanted the betrayal, it organized the treason. From beginning to end the Left vacillated, going over, one after another, to the side of the betrayers.

One of the most important results of the general strike will be the workers' rejection of their old leaders. The general strike is the first step in the tremendous shedding process which the British working class is undergoing, the sloughing off of the old dead skin of the old generation of leaders and the emergence of a new leadership.

But the most important, the most fundamental lesson which the British workers will gain from this gigantic battle, will be the knowledge that neither the trade unions as pure and simple economic organs, nor the simple parliamentary political struggle, are sufficient alone to carry the working class to victory, to the liberation from capitalist exploitation. The working class will discover the necessity to organize a political party which not only captures seats, which can not only distinguish itself in parliamentary battles of words, but which is also able to organize the revolutionary struggle of the proletariat for victory.

The result of this fundamental experience and all of the above-mentioned experiences, will be the rise of a mass Communist Party. The mobilization of the entire armed power of the state and the marshalling of the biggest courts to declare the general strike illegal will contribute heavily towards the crystallization of the Communist Party as a mass party.

The Astbury decision will exercise as deep an influence upon the whole life of the British labor movement as did the Taff-Vale decision in 1901. At that time the Taff-Vale decision convinced the British workers that their fight was hopeless if restricted to purely economic forms, that state power and class court could wipe out their right to picket

in time of strike, that the trade unions collectively were to be held liable financially for the actions of every member. The British working class responded to the Taft-Vale decision by forming its first political mass organization, by founding the Labor Party:

"The Labor Party is the expression of the despair of the old trade union methods as much as of disgust with the old political parties." (Frank H. Rose).

The Labor Party from the very beginning was a reformist, opportunistic organization, yet notwithstanding Lenin was correct when, in 1908 he argued for its admission into the Second International for the reason that:

"... it (the Labor Party) REPRESENTS THE FIRST STEPS on the part of the real proletarian organizations of England toward a conscious class policy and toward a SOCIALIST WORKERS' Party."

There can be no doubt that the repetition of the Taft-Vale decision in the Astbury decision, will force the British working class to the second step in the direction of a class conscious policy, in the direction of a truly Socialist Workers Party.

The first tremor of British imperialism, a result of German and American imperialism in the 'nineties, drove the British capitalists to their first general assault against the British trade unions, against the English working class. The Taft-Vale decision became the symbol of the general offensive of the British ruling class against the British workers. The present crisis of the British Empire which now sees its world monopoly terminated by the predominant American imperialism and by the advancing industrialization of the colonies, has driven the British capitalists to another attack against the working class. The mobilization of state power and the Astbury decision are the decisive steps in this offensive. The consequence of the first crisis of British imperialism and the first offensive of the British employers was the founding of the Labor Party. The result of the second decisive crisis of British imperialism and the second general offensive of the British capitalists will be—for such is the iron law of history—the crystallization of the Communist Mass Party.

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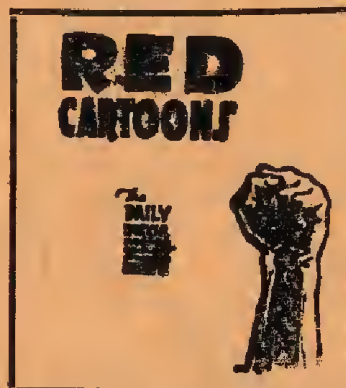
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